
HELEN
by
C.W.Waite

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[redacted]

June 15, 1891

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HELEN

BY

CAMPBELL WALDO WAITE

Sår är vikingavinst, och det pryder sin man, när på bröst eller panna det står;
Låt det blöda; förbind det se'n dygnet är om, men ej förr, vill du helsas för vår.

FRITHIOF'S SAGA.

ILLUSTRATED BY LOUIS BRAUNHOLD

CHICAGO
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1890

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CHICAGO

To the Memory of
A Mother
Whose crystal-clear mind,
beneficent heart, and
trustful soul,
blossomed and bore fruit in
a genial life,
a peaceful death,
and a blessed name,
is dedicated,
in loving reverence,
this story
of a woman's struggle
toward the light.

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Eng. on wood by Mollier.

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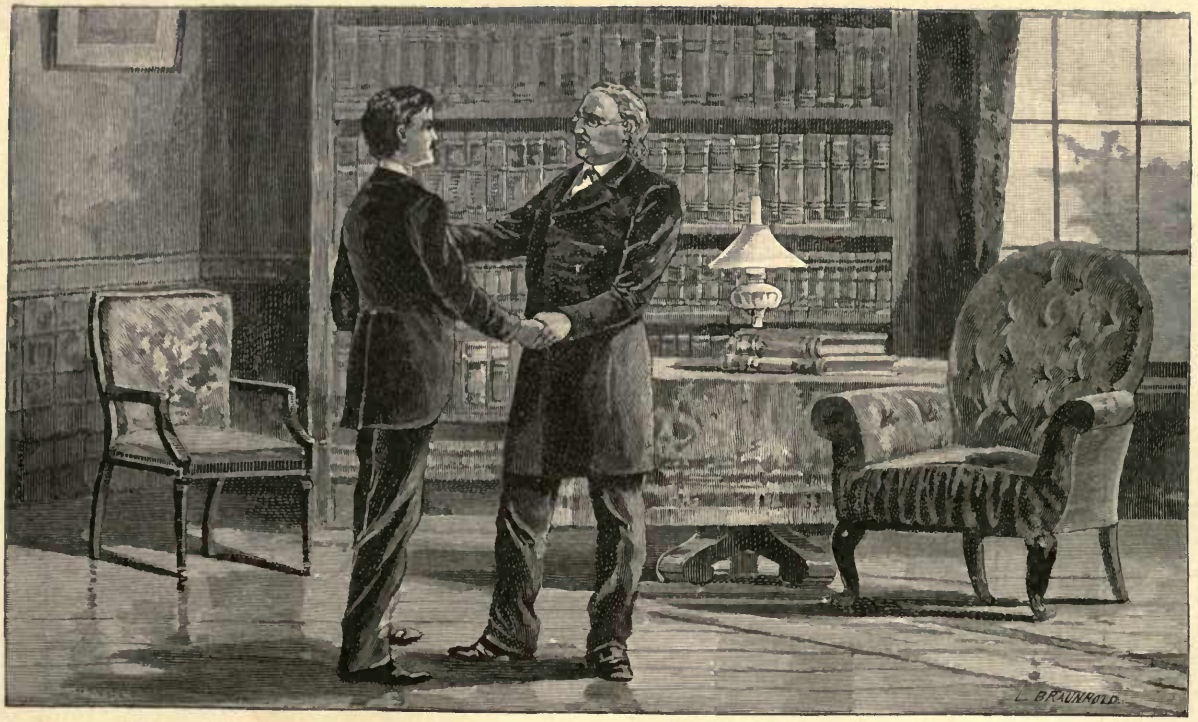
In his barnyard, one day, in a ruminant mood,
With his dumb-languaged pets round him, Farmer Mark stood.

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Her head sank on his true, strong, and masterful breast,
Where she found the years' guerdon—ineffable rest.

PART FIRST

LOSS



Standing, straight as a lance,
'Neath the Doctor's review, in the radiant flush
Of youth's glamour of strength.

CANTO FIRST.

HAZARD.

I.

"I must talk to you plainly," the old Doctor said,
While he shook, in grave, medical way, his bald head.
"I am not at all satisfied with your condition;
And, as one who has served sire and son, as physician,
These thirty long years, and is, at the best,
A poor hand at professional lying, the zest,
And the grace as well, lacking therefor, there are things
I must urge you to yield, to which all your soul clings
As to life itself—nay, which I know that you hold
E'en above life's sweet boon, above earth's green or gold."

II.

"My dear Doctor, speak freely. 'Tis better the case
I should hear as it stands, and look facts in the face;
For I know that whatever you choose to tell me,
The truth dressed in no garb of phrase-feigning will be."

III.

"'Tis just this," said the Doctor; and then a big lump
Seemed to lodge in his throat, while his words in a clump
Rolled together; and, hesitant standing, he hemmed,
And the tide of his speech for a moment was stemmed;
But at length he went on. "Bluntly this I must say:
That your once ruddy health is now fast giving way;
For your travels abroad, having done you scant good,
Leave you weaker in muscle, and thinner in blood;

There's no stay in your flesh, and your pulse does not show
The beat rhythmic blood measures where health's currents flow.
The dread seeds of consumption, my boy, have been sown
In your blood ere your birth. Though they have not yet
grown—
While not yet is the malady fastened on you,—
'Tis but one stage removed. This 'tis vain from your view
To conceal."

IV.

Now, whoe'er but a casual glance
At Mark Landis had cast, standing straight as a lance,
'Neath the Doctor's review, in the radiant flush
Of youth's glamour of strength, seeming ready to crush
Opposition, from whatever source it might come,
Would have deemed the young fellow as sound as a drum.
Quick of limb, clear of eye, full of ardor, he stood,
That spring morn, with a color which came of stirred blood,
But one which the chill draughts, from the White Mountains
drawn,
Would drive off, leaving cheeks that were sallow and wan:
Like full many a tinge that exhibitors wear
In the booths of inspection in Vanity Fair.

V.

'Twas no marvel the words in the good Doctor's throat
Stuck in breaking the truth with such sad bodements fraught;
For young Mark from a child he had constantly loved,
And his disinterested affection had proved,
As the lad up through youth into man's estate grew,
In the unobserved ways his great heart only knew.
And the Doctor had cherished a dream—(ah, they cease
Not when age stealeth on, nor in brightness decrease,

When infirmity cometh, those beautiful dreams!
Only when on crepuscular shadows there beams
The aurora of shadowless day, are they lost
In the waking of death-bridging, fathomless trust,)—
A dream based on an infantile troth that between
The one child of his house and the boy Mark had been
By fond parents exchanged. When the lad showed a gift
Clear and great, when he seemed fate-commissioned to lift
The charmed veil of the Beautiful, and the true keys
That unlock the arcana of Genius to seize,
With so fervent a faith and so anxious a gaze
Had the old Doctor watched the developing rays
Of this intellect beaconing years that were far,
That he viewed it as shepherds viewed Bethlehem's star.

VI.

The physician, with bluntness and earnestness blent,
Thus resumed, with his patient's gaze close on him bent.
"I can see but one remedy now left for you,
If you care for preserving your life, to pursue.
But you may (as an invalid prizes his ease)
The specific regard as worse than the disease.
If so, then I must tell you in terms clear and square,
'Tis as well for the worst that you early prepare;
For a crisis unwelcome, I can but infer,
May at any time in your condition occur."

VII.

"Many thanks for your frankness," the young artist said.
"What is this prescribed remedy, gruesome and dread,
And of which you've inspired me with fear in advance?
I entreat, Doctor, not to be kept in suspense."
. . . Then the latter a recipe gave on this wise,
Which the soul of the artist o'erwhelmed with surprise:

VIII.

"It is this: Buy a tract of wild land in the West;
Go there; give all the strength of which you are possessed
To the labor of tilling it; give it your heart;
Set your back on refinements attendant on art;
Drop your palette for years, or for aye; let it be
As a thing of the past to you, till you are free
From the phantom demanding blood-tribute of you.
This condition you can but deem hard, it is true;
But I dare not release you therefrom, as your friend
And adviser, till gained be the striven-for end.

IX.

"Hold the plow; chop; dig ditches; split rails, and milk cows;
Fodder with your own hands, and heap up your own mows;
Make companions of horses, your life graft on theirs;
Pet them, court them, and love them, and lighten their cares;
And teach them to love you; bed them down in their stalls;
And thus mix among all of your languageless thralls.
Tend your kine and your sheep; feed your pigs and your calves;
Your worst work yourself do, and do nothing by halves.
Lay your gloves with your art far away on the shelf;
And a hard-working farming-man make of yourself.
Gather muscle and sinew, bronze, blisters, and brawn;
Learn like oxen to sweat, and forget how to yawn;
Become utterly tired and wolf-hungry from work,
And eat nothing less hearty than mutton and pork;
Delve all day in the fields, till your back-bone shall bend,
And at night lie down feeling the bed your best friend.
For those delicate fingers and palms soft and fair,
Get the rough, horny hands that the harvesters bear;
And vow never to look toward New England again,
Until strength arms each nerve, and red blood fills each vein."

X.

"Or until on the prairie my grave has been made,
And with head to the East in my last rest I'm laid,"
Added Landis with bitter-sad smile.
"Kill or cure!"
Grimly answered the Doctor. "This test to endure,
Should you try it, the fates kindly lend you their aid!"
"I will try it!" Mark Landis, with lips compressed, said.

* * *

XI.

In the orchards infolded in gray granite hills,
Where tilth's struggle with nature life's whole measure fills,
The old apple-trees, rugged as skalds of the North,
Their new buds with our opening tale putting forth,
Had their snow-showery blossoms not dropped to the earth,
And still fresh were the hopes to which Easter gives birth,
While was yet but half bared nature's Puritan breast,
When Mark Landis, the purposed, was far in the West.



CANTO SECOND.

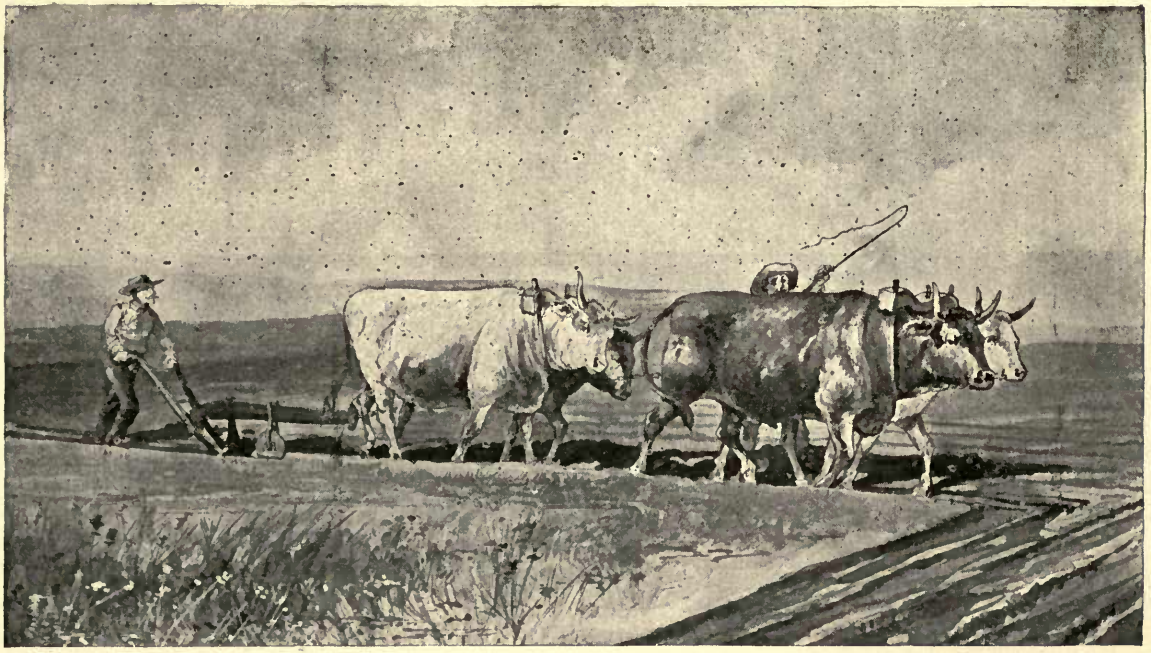
HELP.

I.

When Jehovah, unfolding His infinite plan,
Gave the world, in its newly wrought beauty, to man,
And the creature, in freshness of spirit, went forth
Through the radiant, redolent, resonant earth,
With unprobed, untongued gratitude swelling his breast,
To survey the resplendent, grand glory-bequest,
I doubt not that in Eden, stretched out in rich green,
Fair, bright, full-blooming, far-spreading prairies were seen—
The Creator's own meadow-lands, planted in love,
Where the angels with primitive mortals might rove.
The glad prairie! What stories of beauty it tells,
With its scarcely perceptible undulant swells,
Like those which on the blue sea's sublime bosom play,
When, becalmed, its deep sobs in soft sighs die away!
'Tis the beauty of night, with its star-wealth begemmed;
'Tis the beauty of ocean, unmeasured, unframed;
'Tis the beauty of holiness, pure as the breath
That once, glorified, burst through the portals of death.

II.

Behold, strong in stern purpose, the young artist stand,
With his feet on the soil as it came from God's hand,
Farewell bidding to hopes he had nourished as part
Of the web of existence, inuring his heart
To the new and unwelcome life-trial that fate
For him held, its result with calm soul to await.



See them breaking the prairie! How clean the turned sod
Where but foot of the Indian hunter hath trod!

III.

See them breaking the prairie! How clean the turned sod,
Where but foot of the Indian hunter hath trod!
Cut but gently, O, plowmen, in Nature's soft breast!
'Tis the pillow where one day your heads shall find rest.
Mother Nature, be patient! They scarify thee,
But to show, in the healing, how fair thou canst be.
Ah, the gay, furrowed field! They have put a new gown
On our dame, neatly plaited, and close folded down!

* * *

IV.

When Mark Landis work on his new land had begun,
A sensation had through the vicinity run,
At the sight of a modest, soft-spoken young man,
With the hand of a girl, and a countenance wan,
Making feint of farm-tilling in earnest. There spread
A broad smile o'er the general face; and 'twas said:
"A fine farmer will *he* make, to start on wild land!"
"See that delicate face, and that lily-white hand!"
"'Twill be little of farming that he will do here!"
"That he errs in his calling is perfectly clear:
What a pity his gifts aren't permitted to shine
In the far more congenial man-milliner's line!"
So the talk went about, and a welcome he met
In the neighborhood where his stakes thus he had set,
Such as by the world's custom a poor bride receives
On her advent among the groom's rich relatives.
But Mark kept his own course, with his mind, and his heart,
And his hands on his work, and his life lived apart
From his much-talking neighbors, excepting times when
Business called him to mingle among them: and then,

As confession from one to the other went round,
Their new neighbor a frank, bright, good fellow they found.

V.

One day, Mark, with his fall plowing having got through,
Was constructing a fence through a troublesome slough,*
(A feat taxing the patience sublimest, and one
With defeat oft attended, and eke with profanity's tone,)
And in order to get for his posts solid ground,
Waded in for some distance, till he at length found
That the bottom, like hope, was delusive, when—plump !—
Down, and up to his arm-pits, he sank in a sump.
In the dark, turbid depths of the slough he was foundered,
And there, in the slush, like a terrapin floundered.
Though fate with naught tragic impending was frowning,
And *nil* was the proximate danger of drowning,
Our amateur farmer yet deemed, just at present,
His *status* one vastly, grotesquely unpleasant;
But, trouble's summation to compass right there,
And o'erwhelm him with misery too great to bear,
Who should happen along, but a buxom, brown creature,
On pony as much like its mistress in feature
As possible for any being not human
To be like a bright, budding, beautiful woman!
The pony with mane, like a hero with glory,
Was covered : the maid's dark hair told the same story.
To a species the pony belonged that was rare :
As unique was its rider's *ensemble* as fair.

* Although *slough* by the books can rhyme only with *plough*,
Orthoëpic *lex loci* such sound won't allow;
For where prairie-grass grows, other way there is none
Of pronouncing it save as the author has done;
And one might as well try to catch grouse with a hook,
As to go in such cases according to book.



Who should happen along, but a buxom, brown creature,
On a pony as much like its mistress in feature . . .

Hard to be, even by its own mistress, controlled,
Was the pony : the rider was cast in like mould ;
For she never in life had a master yet known,
And had up to this hour unsubdued ever gone.

VI.

The brown maid did not do what the typic female
Would presumably do ; for she did not turn pale ;
Did not shriek ; did not faint ; her sweet hands did not wring ;
Did not waste precious moments in cross-questioning ;
But, dismounting, into the abysmal profound
She began heaving in rails and stakes, to make ground
For the feet of this mortal o'erwhelmed to stand on,
Whose foundations as weak as Greek sophists' had grown ;
And, by timely and practical efforts like this,
Saved a soul from despair's and from mud's dark abyss ;
And the settler, from mire of the roiled prairie pond,
Came like Christian from out of the Slough of Despond,
And abashed stood, in front of the fair prairie rover,
A sight fit for satyrs and fawns to laugh over.

VII.

If you know, reader, how an æsthetic youth feels,
Posed in plethoric slush, from his head to his heels,
With a sweet maiden's eyes full upon him, alight
With the liveliest sense of his ludicrous plight,
And the tide of her laughter through pity restraining,
Yet all the more humbling him by thus refraining ;
Then you can conceive how Mark Landis now felt,
Face to face with the brown beauty, ready to melt
With chagrin and confusion, in this awkard fashion
Mud-monument standing of female compassion.

VIII.

The fair gypsey, then mounting her pony once more,
Said ingenuously to the farm amateur;
With a slight vein of humor her manner pervading:
"'Tis apt to be miry where cattle are wading;
The new soil is springy, and water flows under;
And that you should get *sloughed*,* sir, is surely no wonder."

IX.

It was hard for young Landis, though trying his best,
To appreciate this sympathetical jest.
But he tendered to her his thanks, hearty, sincere,
With a grace worthy of an old-time cavalier.
And while then her round face with great good humor beamed,
And a dim, undefinable something there seemed
Underneath her arched eyebrows acquaintance to beckon,
She said:
"You are newly arrived here, I reckon."

X.

From out of the slime that lay thick on Mark's face,
And from out of the depths of defeat and disgrace,
Beamed, through wide-open windows of glowing black eyes,
A peculiarly Puritan look of surprise,
As his critical, cultured, New England ear heard
That robust, dialectal term "reckon"—a word
Which of good old Kentucky plantation-life rang,
Whence her accent showed clearly her ancestry sprang.
. . . He collected himself, and replied:
"I've been here
Through the bloom and the harvest that gladden the year,

* I may say to those not in the West reared, that he
Who holds more of the "juice of the still" than can be
Borne with equipoise normal, is well understood,
In the prairie vernacular phrase, to be *sloughed*.

And your face I remember not yet to have seen,
Although, had I once seen it, 'twould surely have been
Not so quickly forgotten."
This last clause he spoke
To himself, and by no means to her, while his look
On her singularly contradictory face
Rested still, as if seeking lost thoughts there to trace—
A face now to him seeming to bear the impress
Of a deep-underlying, sustained earnestness.

XI.

"Had I been here," she answered, "you could not have failed
To discover my pony and me; for we two have prevailed
Hereabout, like the ague, since I was a child.
We've both roamed o'er these prairies, two creatures run wild:
I go where my Prince takes me; and that is the way
That I happened to cross, sir, this prairie to-day.
Tell me truly, old Prince, if the truth I have said;"
And she patted her pet on its forelock-clothed head.

XII.

Then the pony, the willful, the shameless, shook hard
Its old shaggy and mannerless poll, and thus marred
The brown maiden's fine story.
"The pony has ways
Like a woman," said Landis, "and hence, when it says
So decidedly 'No,' the response I receive
As the strong affirmation it wishes to give."

XIII.

"Thanks!" the maiden said, archly; "your liberal rule
Of interpreting would have been helpful at school,
Whence but lately I'm back; and this, sir, is the reason
You have missed seeing us for the whole of the season—

My pony and me. And we'll now have to go ;
For old Prince as you see, sir, the word gives."
"Not so,"
Answered Landis ; "he's nodding, and that signifies
Quite the contrary."

XIV.

Laughter in voice and in eyes
Was her only response ; and Prince now stamped his feet,
And she gathered the reins, when Mark said :
"Should I meet
My deliverer after to-day, and desire to express
For her timely relief my renewed thankfulness,
By what name shall I call the beneficent sprite
Who roams over the prairies like chivalrous knight,
And new farmers from dark depths of misery saves?"
As off cantered the pony, she said :
"Helen Graves."



CANTO THIRD.

ASPIRATION.

I.

That the Doctor's prescription, as given to Mark
In the shadows of those granite hills, when so dark
Was the vista of hope, and one ray only beamed
To illumine a life that with promise had teemed,
Was to be on the blossoming plains of the West,
'Neath conditions more kindly to earth's toilers blessed,
With a conscience-strict literalness carried out,
There was no longer reason nor room for a doubt.

II.

Besides sweating like Adam in tilling the ground,
Mark was careful himself from the first to surround,
In the way the good Doctor had roughly advised,
With groups cheery of horses and cattle, and prized
Very soon their companionship. This became one
Of the few gleams of pleasure upon him that shone
In this life so unlike his bright youth-pictured world—
This life stalwart, and sturdy, and rugged, and gnarled.
From his wearisome toil in the fields, it was rest
To consort with his horses, whose fellowship zest
To his drudgery gave ; their strong pulse and fresh breath
Seemed to frighten the dark, lurking shadows of death ;
And, in gazing into their sincere, honest eyes,
His soul gathered the strength that in sympathy lies ;
While to mount them, and speed o'er the smooth prairie sward,
Sent a message of health to the heart's weakest ward.

And his oxen and cows, and his heifers and steers,
These he petted and handled, and lent them his ears,
Learned with care and with patience their language, and granted
Whatever it was that they told him they wanted.
He found these retainers dumb told him no lies,
And no guile he saw lurk in the depths of their eyes.

III.

For be sure that your true, honest beast never asks
Any thing out of reason, though you, by your tasks,
Ask of him things beyond either reason or right,
And his faith to the death with the cudgel requite.
When a man plays the tyrant o'er men, they can raise
Revolution's red hand, and set cities ablaze,
And bear war, desolation, and death in their path:
Such resort is left manhood oppressed in its wrath.
But when poor beasts of burden the victims are made,
(And with no other beasts is the tyrant-rôle played,)
For them sleeps no rebellion, no remedies lie,
But in patience to drudge, and in silence to die.

IV.

From these creatures the lesson of patience Mark learned,
And more clearly from their rude example discerned
Wherein humble contentedness' secret consists,
And traced duty's straight lines through sophistical mists.
This experience served to himself to reveal
His own heart, and to cause him for others to feel.
Thus the tenderer springs of his nature were brought
Into harmony with his refinement of thought,
And a life that was fragrant of candor and truth
Coursed the vale of these years of his death-shadowed youth.

V.

As the winter came on, and the nights longer grew,
To Mark Landis came thoughts of the day at the slough ;
And the looks and tones then and there caught and preserved
As the subjects for reveries frequent had served.
Then, as winter's long evenings come to be spent,
And as heart of youth ever is maidenward bent,
What more natural sequence of that strange affair,
Than for Mark to seek out the dark-eyed gypsey fair,
And recall the acquaintance so oddly begun?
As the weeks with celerity o'er him had run
Since the maid on her pony had galloped away,
With rich laughter that rang through each subsequent day,
Glimpses frequent, though fleeting, of her he had caught—
Of her pony and her—as, with speed of youth's thought,
And with lightness of love, ever by him they passed;
And it seemed that ne'er notion that pony possessed
Within proximate distance of Landis to veer,
Or to slacken its pace, but straight onward would steer
Its wild course ; and its rider his greeting, the while,
Would acknowledge in gleams of so gracious a smile,
As to keep up the fiction that Prince, and not she,
Caused the haste in which ever the twain seemed to be.

* * *

VI.

Up to this point, but little have I sought to say
Of Mark Landis's mind. I began this my lay
With his body, which had at that time bidden fair
Soon to let his mind out into realms of the air,
Whither no bard could follow it ; nor was yet shown
Any certainty of a long tenure of one

By the other, in this final experiment
Made in darkening shade of a fateful portent.
But as minds such as his are not apt, or not wont,
In the struggle of life, to come oft to the front,
When they do come, although it be but for a day
In the heart of the scene of existence they stay,
They belong for that day to the world, and to time,
And their names should be sounded in golden-hinged rhyme.
Not by any means that I would claim any gilt
For these rhymes in all bardic humility built;
But I would that I had the charmed Orphean power,
But to tell in one rapt, in one glad, golden hour,
In a measure pearled, gilded, and diamond-wrought,
And with rock-moving, tree-stirring melody fraught,
Of the freshness, the vigor, the strength of this soul,
Fighting yonder the fight against earth's direst ghoul.

VII.

Art had come not to Landis through touch of charmed hand,
Or through waving by wizard of magical wand.
'Twas a growth of the soul, from the germ planted there
By the Hand that wrought earth into all shapes so fair.
In his soul, in his mind, in his heart, was one thought,
Which informed him, inspired him, refined him, and brought
Aspirations, and dreams, and impulses in him
Into harmony; while the divine gift to limn
In its myriad phases this thought, had been his
From his boyhood. And large was the measure of bliss
And of joy that had sweetened his life in the task
Of unfolding this gift; and he durst even ask
Of the years that should come, that his new-budding name
Should in time's chosen season bloom forth into fame.

This one thought, all-engrossing, all-grasping, all-strong,
Was the thought, the idea, of Beauty.

VIII.

The throng
Called him artist. Himself he called merely a bowed,
Humble worshiper at Beauty's shrine—one endowed
Not as yet with the mighty, supreme, deathless boon
Of true genius, to come as the tide should flow on,
Which he yearned not to hasten. His patience was great
As his spirit.

IX.

The fullness of time to await,
In the calmness of trust that years justice shall bring,
Tests most justly true genius. If earth too soon ring
With the plaudits of fame, O, ye gifted, beware,
Lest the laurel unfading your brows never wear!

X.

Landis deep draughts had drunk, in his sojourn abroad,
From the pure springs of style that through ages have flowed ;
After masters had wrought in humility's ways,
And with painful intentness, through cloud-shadowed days ;
And yet ne'er was so lost in his love reverent,
As in lap of the gray past to linger content,
And to feel it were vain to seek one beam to add
To the brightness that made the world's yesterday glad.

XI.

After Israel's law-giver's precept, he cast
His look back, to "ask now of the days that are past" ;
Yet with soul reaching forward to things that shall be,
And with vision intuitive gifted to see
Whither lay the true path, and thus clearly discern
Demands Fame makes of those who her prizes would earn,

He could never sit still, though it be at the feet
Of the masters in whom all the genius-gifts meet.

XII.

But to him, no mere abstract idea was art;
Not a something from daily existence apart,
Like a hymn chanted in a cathedral, sublime,
But yet wide, it may be, of the heart of the time ;
Not a theme for diversion of leisure that grew
Heavy on white hands burdened with nothing to do ;
Not a dogma, to be with zeal swallowed, until
From divine doctors comes new prescription to fill ;
Not a dainty conception, to be championed
By effeminate advocates, mild and soft-toned :
But a positive, masculine, strong element,
Active, healthy, demonstrative, and withal blent
With the best that was gentle, and tender, and true,
In life, heart, soul, and nature ; and into and through
The whole fabric of his earnest life it was wrought ;
Formed the base of the logic of all of his thought ;
Built a rainbow to span each day's cloud-sorrowed sky ;
Hung a lode-star in hope's starry firmament high ;
Filled the darkest of nights full of glory and light ;
Gave his soul content, sweetness, health, courage, and might.

XIII.

Such the trend of his mind ; but no still prophet he ;
For, though modest as maidenhood seemed he to be
To the outward world, yet when occasion came truth
To declare as he saw it, to fervor of youth
All the force of strong manhood he added, and spoke
In a tone that fell stoutly as battle-axe stroke ;
Then would rush with impetuousness to the charge,
While his black eyes glowed like a Vulcanian forge.

He was vehement, stormy, as augurs of war;
Arbitrary, assertive, as geniuses are;
Eloquent, with the eloquence stern of a John
In the wilderness, crying the Sanctified One.

XIV.

With a mind thus endowered, a soul thus illumed,
What might not be forepromised, what not be assumed?
Ah, the faintness of flesh! Ah, the stoutness of spirit!
Were natures in earth-life all frames to inherit
Proportionate to their immortal parts made,
O'er earth's highways what giants, what pigmies would tread!

XV.

When young Landis had come from his studies abroad,
He was placed face to face with a spectre that strode,
Undeterred, undebarred, in at life's open porch,
And stood waiting there, but to extinguish its torch.
Thus, through brain-striving, hope-hallowed, heart-trusting days,
He had come in his course to the parting of ways;
And a parley, at this supreme juncture, was had
With the guest so untimely, unwelcome, and dread,
And a new lease of hope made, on terms that left life,
So had thought the lessee, scarcely worth farther strife.

CANTO FOURTH.

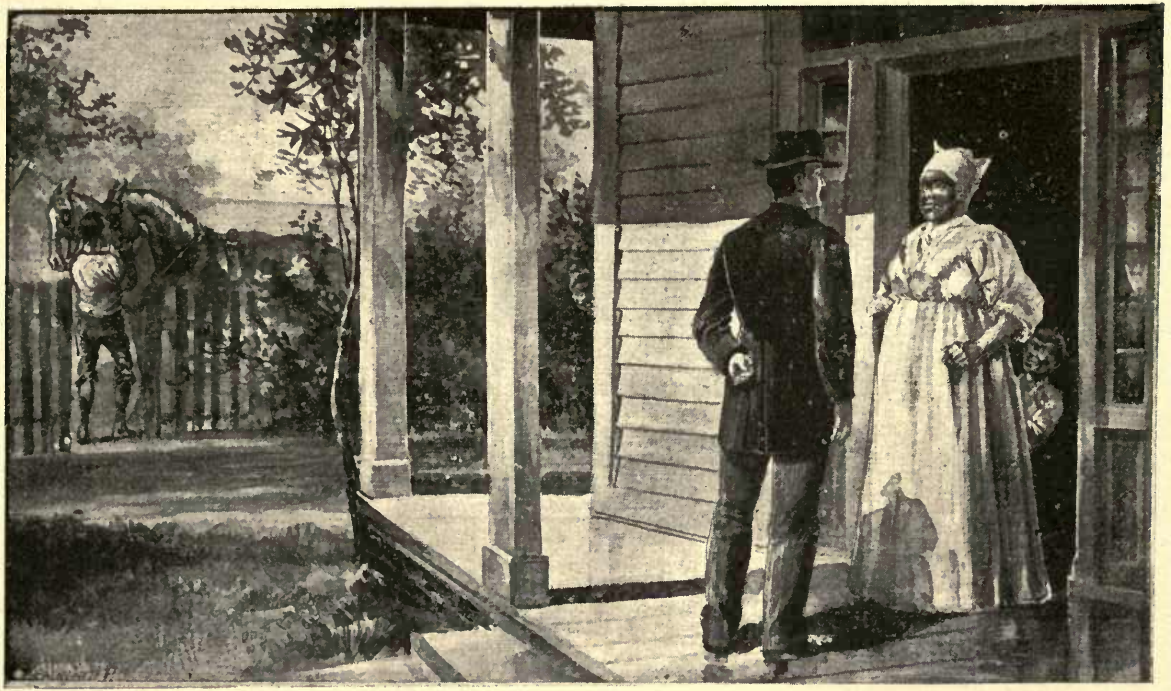
INSTRUCTION.

I.

Such the fragment of life, dimly lighted with hope,
That one midsummer eve massive coursers drove up
To the Graves farm's great gate, which was swung open wide
By a wild group of younglings in Afric's tinge dyed;
And then congeners elder of that dusky race
Took the team into care, and left Landis to trace
His own way to the dwelling.

II.

It may happen now,
But 'twas rare in those days, that one Ethiop's brow
Should show on life's horizon, not followed by more.
So, when Mark rang the bell at the old farm-house door,
Sable servitors twain came, with bustle and din,
Each in way of the other, to usher him in.
One was mighty queen regnant o'er hearth and o'er hall,
From whose mandate exempt was no hope-nursing soul;
And the other was one of those imps of this world,
Through some spite of the other among mortals hurled.
Grand, resplendent, was "Aunty", in bandanna bound,
And the imp mainly robed in the dust of the ground.
After fierce objurgations a many, the "child
Of destruction" by "Aunty" was awed, or beguiled,
Into taking "Mars' Landersiz'" hat to the rack,
And his card to "Miss Hellun."



Sable servitors twain came, with bustle and din.
Each in way of the other, to usher him in.

III.

. . . Mark half started back
When before the brown elf of the prairie he stood ;
For he found her, it seemed, in a sorrowing mood,
As he saw that from weeping her dark orbs were red.
"I regret to apologize," Helen Graves said,
While her glance briefly over the caller's form strayed,
And a smile in the depths of her brimming eyes played,
Like a nymph in the waves of a translucent spring ;
"But the truth is, that I was aroused by your ring
From a tale I've been reading, wherein I was moved
With a scene that too strong for my feelings had proved,
Which I did not have time to control and subdue,
When your name was announced."

IV.

"And may I trouble you
To read over the so moving passage for me?"
"Willingly ; [pausing slightly, then ;] only, you see,
It is French, and my rendering would but abate
The fine force of the language."

V.

"You need not translate,"
He rejoined. Helen colored.
"Assume, please," she said,
"That another apology humbly is made."
From the story she read. As before he had been,
Once again he was rapt in the charms of "Corinne".

VI.

Blessings on thee, De Staël! What millions of hearts
Have been healed by the balm which that story imparts !
While the fair Adriatic melts into the sea,
Thy grand name will be loved in redeemed Italy ;

While hearts still bleed and break in the old realm of love,
The "last song" of Corinne will a sweet solace prove ;
And while France, with all faults, shall gem earth's history,
A wide world of true souls will pay tribute to thee.

VII.

The particular passage in question she read ;
And, encouraged by him, still read on, while he made
In the pauses his comments ; and in honest strain
Praised her accent, o'er which he much marveled ; for then,
(Now, ah, me ! near a third of a century gone,)
In this land which instruction's sun feigns to shine on
With beams specially favoring, boarding-school French
Was adapted one's feelings with anguish to wrench,
Whose heart's finest of fibres with discord were stirred,—
One who loved, and had, loving, in purity heard,
And oft used, this queen language. And yet he failed not
Criticism to mingle with praise, pointing out
Where he deemed some improvement might aptly be made,
To his fine ear suggested.

VIII.

The book aside laid,
Landis, interested, and desiring to learn
Something more of this mind, in which he could discern
Signs of most select thought, probing gently began,
And his tentative talk an enlarged circuit ran.
He first plied her with questions concerning the course
Of her studies at school, and sought after the source
Of the discipline rare which he clearly perceived
That, bizarre though her ways, her true self had received.
For he saw, in the limited sphere of her thought,
Such a thoroughness as compensation had wrought

For the moderate number of paths in the field
Of book-knowledge that she had yet trod ; and the yield
Which had come from her close, careful gleanings thus far,
Was much richer than girl-gleanings commonly are.
This idea recurred to him once and again,
Nor a casual word thereon could he restrain.

IX.

"Some one must," he remarked, "the proof surest have shown
Of a friendship as true as soul ever has known,
And at feet of such friendship a tribute have laid,
Which in girlhood or womanhood seldom is paid.
For no friend to a girl shows such test of friend's truth,
As the one who her mind guides aright in its growth.
All in vain, if the food on which intellect feeds
Shall the sustenance lack right development needs,
Will be wisest of precept, and best of example :
'Tis in shutting out thieves that is kept pure the temple.
Some supremely true soul, with an instinct refined,
Must have guided and guarded your bourgeoning mind.
It must be that to such one great honor is due,
For I dare not assign the main credit to you,
For thus steering so clear of the vast transient mass
Which a young intellect in our shamed day must pass,
Moving on o'er the sea of light literature—
The drift, sea-weed, and muck, floating islands impure,
And debris of wrecked souls, which long rotting have lain,
And so many a life-barque have whelmed in the main."

X.

"My selection of reading I owe," she replied,
"To a lady, a native of France, who supplied

For long years the dear place of a mother to me.
Sad her lot ; lone her life ; dark her heart-mystery.
As you've been kind enough in myself to note, sir,
Some effects due not partly, but wholly to her,
If you listen in patience, I will, at some length,
Tell of her to whom mainly is due what of strength
There may seem in my character."

"I am intent,"
He replied, "and my ears shall be earnestly lent."

"Yet," she said, "bear in mind that there is to reveal
But *my* side of

THE STORY OF MADAME MARSILÉ.

"She had loved but to suffer ; and her suffering
Was such only as death its releasement could bring.
She ne'er told me her sorrow ; she said it was one
Only God's ear could hear ; she must bear it alone,
And alone see the end. She had with us a home,
At her choice, till life's close, but was fated to roam.
Though of origin humble, such culture was hers
As instruction the highest and choicest confers.
While her bearing was that of one noble of birth,
Yet so pure was her nature, so rare was her worth,
As to make one in her gentle presence forget
All the barriers wide by society set.
The great world, in its lights and its shades, she had seen ;
Yet her heart ever dwelt in a far-remote scene,
In a legend-filled part of her land. It was there
She was born ; and she said in its bosom so fair,
When her troubles were ended, she longed to be laid.
And my father with me a long voyage once made

To that spot, to learn if she perchance had not found
The sweet rest she had wished in her own native ground ;
But no trace of her living or dead could we find,
While I left half my heart in her birth-place behind.

. . .

"She was tender and loving-kind ever to me,
And as patient as fondest of mothers could be.
Her corrections were gentlest instruction ; she taught
That the world is with truest of happiness fraught ;
And thus carefully strove not to cloud my young days
With the sadness and anguish that lined all her ways.
Less from books than in converse familiar she taught,
And with nature my mind to commune closely brought.
She went out with me into the fresh, fragrant fields,
And, while we plucked the blossoms that nature's breast yields,
Taught me there the old science of bud and of blade,
As I ne'er could have learned it in books ; then she made
Me with rock-lore familiar, and thus my mind led
Into true paths of study, while slowly I read
Nature's riddle. . . .

"To my mental grasp, too, she brought,
The vast treasures with which human records are fraught.
She unfolded in converse the world's history,
And that study a loving one thus made for me.
She told me, as a nurse tales to childhood may tell,
The long story of Europe, which thus I learned well.
She recounted in sadness the shame of the old,
And the glory the new that gilds gladly she told—
How oft ruled, and how hard, hoary wrong, yet how bright
Earth was made when at times broke the sunburst of right.
From her ne'er escaped tones dear to cynical ears ;
She lost never her hope in the world's better years.

Through her loved voice the past came down mellowed to me,
And the present I learned in faith's colors to see.
I forgive the dear soul for the too partial hand
With which ever she garnished her own cherished land :
'Tis but what I have found in all text-histories :
His own realm through stained windows each chronicler sees.
Hers with eye reverential saw Madam Marsile,
As his saint devotee ; and her spirit I feel ;
For she told me such tales of her native Provence,
As my young heart enlisted in fond love for France.

. . .

" Of my reading what care did she take! Yet she gave
Ever clearest of reasons for interdicts grave ;
And would say, with an earnest and soul-reaching tone,
That will ring through my years till the last one be flown,
That ' Dirt ever is dirt, whether trod underfoot,
Flecking face, soiling robe, or besmirching repute ;
Whether blackening tongue, with leer sullying look,
Or defacing the page of a golden-bound book ;
Or yet lurking, with meaning impure, insincere,
In the sanctified portal of maidenhood's ear. '

. . .

" With supreme healthfulness and with wisdom replete
Was her varied discourse. In tones helpful and sweet
She imparted the lessons of life, which are framed
In my soul, in a border of gold, with bright jewels begemmed.
Once we passed by the bed of a brook, nearly dry.
' See these pebbles,' she said ; ' though supinely they lie,
Let the rain-swollen rivulet over them run,
And through murmuring ripples they'll laugh to the sun.
And thus we human pebbles lie listless, until
Some great sorrow or trouble life's drained channels fill ;

Then our souls through their waves into action are brought,
And our measureless griefs into rhythm are wrought.'

. . .

"In the realm of the heart, on a motherless girl
She bestowed with rare grace wisdom's purchaseless pearl.
She said: 'Never a soul in all ages made wreck,
Did it listen to conscience's first gentle beck;'
That 'Whoso stands and waits for that arbiter's frown,
Has from virtue's high dais one step taken down.'
And still deeper she went, and gave me such advice
As was meet for ripe years, and to me beyond price;
And I make no excuse, sir, as young maiden might,
For thus bringing some tenderer truths to the light
Which she gave me to cherish until day of need.
Though that day has not come, yet the precepts I heed:
And I'm sure they are such as, if followed, far less
Would the sum in this world make of life-wretchedness.

. . .

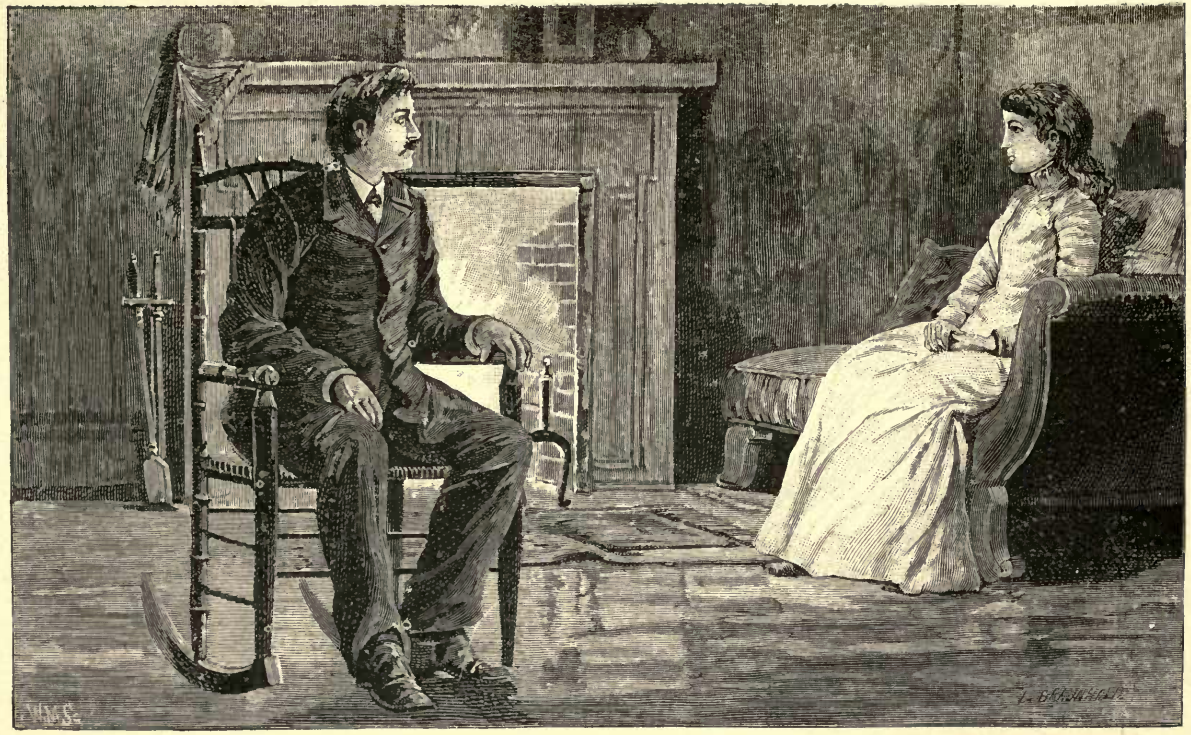
"Of affairs of the heart speaking once, this she said,
On which her mystic troubles strong emphasis laid:
'To a woman the tribute man highest can pay,
Is wide open before her his breast-book to lay;
And her truth to test can there no way surer be
Than this act of superlative heart-honesty.
For a woman, if true to herself and her God,
And if worthy the crown of endowed womanhood,
With but honor will view the man who at her feet
Lays his heart and his hand, though she has but to meet
With rejection his proffer; while she who of hearts
Makes a traffic by fickle and trifling arts,
Against virtue commits a crime well nigh as great,
As the selling of soul at the strange woman's gate.'

With deep earnestness moved, she maintained, that 'First truth,
And then love, is the order of sequence, in youth,
In maturity, and through all years of earth's strife';
That 'A love without truth is a soul without life';
That 'A woman untrue to one heart on the earth
Is untrue to the mother from whom she had birth.'
. . . "But, ah! were I to tell you all things that she said,
'Twere to fill all the nights till the winter be fled.
Heaven guard her, if living, in sorrow or pain,
And bring back the dear soul to her home here again!"

.

XIII.

The girl ceased; and her eyes with tears once more were filled.
"Could I back to you bring," Landis said, deeply thrilled,
"One so noble and gentle, so tender and true,
By strong wishing, her form soon would gladden your view.
I have not been surprised at the portraiture drawn
Of this being, whose influence over your own
Has with good been so fraught; for I traced such a hand
In your formative thought; but I reverent stand
Before her bright ideal. In dreams I have seen
Women like her; but never my lot has it been
To meet one, save her who, while youth's fire my breast warmed,
Was from parent to guardian angel transformed.
One in sooth may believe such choice spirits but come
Upon earth when the heart with deep sorrow is dumb,
Or when troubles, grown into black clouds, burst in wrath,
And leave ruin and misery strewn in their path,
To lift burdens from breasts with their weight overborne,
And pour balm over wounds with fresh injuries torn;



Thus the evening waned ; and ere they were aware,
The great parlor clock's face was beginning to wear
A look anxious and sharp.

Or, when all of humanity's tides have run low,
To requicken the soul, to rekindle its glow,
And inspire men and women with ends and with aims
Above those which the groveling earth-spirit claims."

XIV.

"You speak truly and justly," in voice still subdued
She responded. "But when in my visions I've viewed
That dear, pale, patient face, as to me it comes back
Along memory's grateful though sorrow-tinged track,
I have thought, that if fate in reserve had for me
So o'erflowing a measure of heart-misery,
It were mercy to let me glide out of the strife
In the unchastened years of the morning of life."

XV.

Then they passed on to topics of livelier tone;
And Mark, when he his tentative plummet let down
Into depths of her girl's understanding, discerned
That not simply from nature's store more had she learned
Than from books, but that what of the ways of mankind
As in flush life pursued (not in fancy outlined)
She had conned, was that from observation which comes,
Rather than from perusing of multiplied tomes.
And in fact it was evident that he could cite
A full score of young women within the short flight
Of a fledgling bird fresh from its nest, who of books
And their authors could chatter like rooks,
And by long odds could out-chatter her. But this fact
Served in nowise in Landis's mind to detract
From the estimate he had been forming of one
Who had furnished new food for his thoughts to feed on;
And he now the more strongly inclined to view her
As a fresh and most womanly life-integer,

And decidedly worth further study, and—well,
Of his further inclinings I shall not now tell;
But—what minds like his fashioned of all things prefer—
He had found Helen Graves a superb listener.

XVI.

Thus the evening waned; and ere they were aware,
The great parlor-clock's face was beginning to wear
A look anxious and sharp, with hands raised to its brows;
And with Landis a serious question arose,
As to where were the darkies, and where was his team?
But in yon immense kitchen, enveloped in dream,
And before a huge fire, lay swart forms bivouacked,
Ready promptly to spring into action when waked
By the stern voice of "Aunty," who would as soon think
Of projecting her soul o'er eternity's brink,
As to seek her repose until "Miss Hellun" slept,
O'er whose slumbers that true heart had watch and ward kept
All her years, as it had o'er the slumbers of her
From whom Helen had life, in the Southland afar.

XVII.

The team duly was brought; the good-nights were exchanged;
And Mark Landis drove homeward, while through his mind ranged
Thoughts like these:

XVIII.

"Strange that here, in this land of to-day,
In the newness and freshness of nature, away
From the culture and brain of the East, I should find,
In this girl running wild on the prairie, combined
Qualities I had thought were the product supreme
Of our civilization's established *régime*,

Where, on fruitage in bright, chosen homes of its own,
Beams with brilliancy focal enlightenment's sun!
But thus far, in my roaming the Old World and New,
Amid all natures fair that have burst on my view,
I have here, in this nook of the rough-seeming West,
Found humanity blossoming forth at its best.

XIX.

"Have I then a new lesson in wisdom to learn?
Is this one of the earnests that I am to earn
In this field of instruction and struggle combined,
So in contrast with what hope to youth had outlined?
Am I here to discern that the soul-germ in man
Over-culture as oft can enervate as can
Over-tillage the fructuous strength of the earth,
And to soul, as to soil, carry weakness and dearth?

XX.

"For an hour of diversion I went. I obtained
Large instruction from life's rich experience gained.
The keen, saucy, and challenging eyes I had deemed
Half invited me to a flirtation, have beamed
A whole evening with but sincereness on me;
And the voice that had once seemed a hoyden's to be
Rang as ring voices ever where life-issues teem,
And rings still like a monitor heard in a dream.

XXI.

"Is then all of the credit due Madame Marsile,
And to Helen Graves none? Does not nature reveal
Signs of latent strength borrowed not,—even that she
Thereof lender might rather than borrower be?"

XXII.

Thus mused Mark, while returning from this, his first call
On the bright beauty who had smiled soft o'er his fall

In the Slough of Despond. Odd result, this, in faith,
From event so grotesque ! In the drama of breath
We enact in this world, ah, how close interwrought
Are the grave and the comic, in deed and in thought,
In life's prose and its poetry ! Sorrows impinge
On the borders of pleasure, and tragic dyes tinge
The disguises that earth's merry maskers employ,
And the seams of the robes of the daughters of joy.

XXIII.

As to Helen's original strength, both of mind
And of soul, I have views of my own, which, defined
To Mark Landis that night, might have helped him to solve
Queries still ceasing not in his mind to revolve,
And with puzzling emotions to stir up his breast
After he had betaken himself to his rest.

XXIV.

Men and women ofttimes their ideals transcend
In the forming of character. When, with clear end,
One adopts as a model some nature benign,
One is apt to invest it with traits half divine ;
And the model ere long grows beneath loving hands,
Till embodied with all of the graces it stands.
Thus are idols and saints formed on earth ; and of kin
Is the worship of heroes.

XXV.

And let him begin
Who has taste for such work, that of battering down
All these idols so dear, and of tearing the crown
From each one of these saints : not for me be the task ;
Naught of this glory iconoclastic I ask.
Let alone my Penates and Lares, I cry,
And I'll let alone yours. Now, if you choose to try,

Ye inquisitors, this soul of mine on the charge
Of idolatry, then, in the liberty large
Wherewith He, the Grace-Giver, hath made us all free,
My appeal from the old to the new law shall be.

XXVI.

Full of fictions is life. Even strongest of laws
Are based on legal figments. Full many a cause
Looking toward humanity's betterment rests
On assumptions enduring not logic's stern tests.
Richest, healthiest, truest of wisdom is taught
Through thin fabrics of fancy in fable-land wrought.
Yea, in parable-fiction the Nazarene gave
Supereminent truths which a lost race should save.
These saints, idols, and heroes that you would destroy
Are but fictions that mortals imperfect employ
To embody traits, sentiments, truths, making up
Much of life's better aggregate. Faith, purpose, hope,
All are outlined in them. Vandals, pause ere you deal
Your harsh, leveling blows! Truth's own spirit may feel
Their destructive effects! Ay, 'tis well to take heed,
Lest you make the Heart once crucified freshly bleed.

XXVII.

I think Helen Graves was — as scarce one who is not—
A confirmed hero-worshiper; and, having sought
An exemplar the highest in Madame Marsile,
And of her learned with healthiest promptings to feel,
And to think in a crystal-clear channel, she then,
What we all do, (that is, bear in mind, when we can,)
Had improved on the model. I think that the love
Of that woman so noble availed but to prove
All the truth and the strength of our Helen's great soul;
And when no more she saw of her who held control

Of the springs of her heart, her ideal she wrought,
With gold-garnishment, into an idol, and brought
Unto it all the tributes her mind could invent,
Till the idol became one in which there were blent
Hardly more of the traits that graced Madame Marsile,
Than of those Helen's life had not failed to reveal.

XXVIII.

If of this high ideal, grown in soul and in heart,
Helen was in her future at times to depart,
And o'ercast was at seasons her lodestar to be,
'Twould be but a time-worn demonstration that she,
In her spirit as fresh as the first breath of day,
Like all mortals must fail who perfection essay.



CANTO FIFTH.

IDEALITY.

I.

When Mark Landis awoke the next morning, it seemed
That the sun with a splendor unusual beamed,
And that somehow there had, in the night's shadows past,
From his back some small part of his burden been cast;
And thus through the thick clouds that had hung over him,
There came some rays of hope, e'en though feeble and dim;
And he went to his work with a much lighter heart
Than a twelvemonth had seen.

II.

Whence this change? Had a dart
From love's quiver pierced barely the outermost fold
Of his breast, into life warmed its breath that was cold,
And from out of its winter waked spring? . . . He repelled
The suggestion, and surely would promptly have quelled
Any rising like this which appeared.

"What had he—
He, the invalid, struggling for leave but to be,—
What had he, with his fraction of life, that a breath
Might waft out into blankness of night and of death,
To do now with such feeling as love? 'Twas for him
First to settle accounts with the creditor grim
That stood firmly before him, inflexible Fate,
And find what to himself was the balance that yet

Might, if any, be due. As to this new event,
'Twas indeed very strange, if what only was meant
As a simple exchange of life's courtesies, made
Between two chance acquaintances, each with clear head,
Were construed into anything more or beyond!
An idea absurd!"

III.

Keep your scorn within bound,
O, Mark! None hath accused you, at least have not I;
For I fancy the rift in the cloud that your sky
Long o'ercast has but come from the fact that your mind
Has enjoyed a release from the chain that confined
Its fresh thoughts; a relax from the tension that strained
Your young, vigorous nature, which thus has regained
Something of its old strength and elastic reserve,
And refelt the keen touch of your bright spirit's *verve:*
Yet one can but be with the conviction impressed,
That if such an effect be produced in your breast
By a mere visit for your diversion thus made,—
A bare casual call on a young prairie-maid,—
If so quickening be the result to your heart;—
(I speak now, of course, of its mechanical part,
Which performs all the labor divine, and sublime,
Of maintaining life's poise through the beatings of time,
And adjusting the faintest vibrations that thrill
This mysterious being of ours;) — why, to fill
The prescription again, to a layman would seem
The advice which all doctors the soundest must deem.

IV.

Whether such advice was, in fact, given to Mark,
I know not. But I know that the sweet meadow-lark

With exhilarant song had not twice taken wing
O'er the bloom-sprinkled prairie, the following spring,
Ere the young artist-farmer repeated his call
More than once, more than twice,—but I can not tell all
Of the times that he called, for I was not a spy
On his movements; though I could tell where to apply,
Information complete thereupon to obtain,
And much other analogous knowledge to gain,
Which I give not. For certain industrious souls
A most faithful count kept of each one of those calls,
And by no means thought proper to burden the earth
With their silence. These spirits of superfine worth,
As they have evergreen memories, I dare say,
Could Mark's comings and goings relate to this day.

V.

But no matter. The massive and radiant bays
Of the new Yankee farmer, on balm-breathing days
Of the swift-speeding spring-tide, as well as on eves
Of the summer all golden with fruitage and sheaves,
Were the swinging gate of the Graves farm driven through,
Or his handsomest saddle-steed hitched thereunto,
None too frequently for the fair Helen; and she
Being satisfied, every one else ought to be.
. . . But which one of us all has yet made a success
Of the effort of running life's difficult race
In a manner to suit all spectators? And who,
If he tried to suit all, would with credit get through?

VI.

Let it not be assumed that Mark Landis had slacked
In his energy, or that his labor now lacked
The same interest for him it had at the start.
On the contrary, now he more closely at heart

Seemed to have the great work of his farm, and to be
So absorbed in details the minutest, that he,
'Twas imagined and said by the wise lookers-on,
Must afford very poor entertainment for one
Prizing, like Helen Graves, conversation refined;
And these sage ones much questioned "what Helen could find
To endure in one who of naught save hog and horse,
And corn, pumpkins, and turnips would ever discourse."

VII.

Let us see with what themes Landis freighted the tides
Of his converse with Helen, in drives and in rides.
Driving out with her once, he grew eloquent, while
Speaking, in his old, ardent, impetuous style,
Of the sister-relation Art ever should bear
To Religion.

VIII.

'Twas evening. Summer's soft air
Gently stirred with a breath from the wide prairies blown.
At its full was the white harvest-moon. Never shone
Stars in all of creation's long æons with light
That was purer, sublimer, more heavenly bright.
The fair landscape in silvery radiance lay
Spread before them in peace — the fond dream of the day.
The all-prevalent life of the harvest-fields slept,
And, while sleeping, breathed deeply with fragrance, which swept
Ever past them, diffusing all health-giving scents,
While they passed on from farm unto farm, as through tents
Of an army encampment the sentinels move,
While the foot-weary soldiers in slumberland rove.

IX.

With a fervor he spoke which he could not restrain,
Yet with reverent spirit. And like the refrain
Of a grand hymn prophetic, there fell on her ears,
Rapt in listening silence, this dream of the years :

X.

" The rare bard at whose feet England's grand laureate
In the morn of his fame in rapt reverence sat,—
The bard who of Endymion fair sang in strain
That brought those of the ' Sweet Swan of Avon ' again,—
' Things of beauty ' pronounced ' joys forever '— a truth
Fresh perennially as the first blush of youth.
Where a rose has once bloomed, there's a memory left
Of its fragrance and loveliness, e'en when bereft
Is the place where it budded and blossomed of all
That in substance the rose and its tree can recall.
So, where once a creative design has had birth,
And on canvas, in marble, or metal, stood forth,
And brought joy to the hearts of beholders, the thought
That the master's deft touch into beauty hath wrought,
And hath crystallized into pure art, will endure
When the tablet, the stone, or the sheet is no more.

XI.

" Whosoe'er hath wrought out, in the kingdom of art,
But one beautiful thing, hath thereby borne a part
In true worship. His heart, and his mind, and his soul,
Have in part tasted of the ineffable whole.
He has entered the temple ; has bowed at the altar ;
And though in the faith he may afterward falter,
His eyes the Shekinah once having beheld,
He is thence by a tie to the Infinite held

Which takes hold on the things in eternity's store,
And is nearer forever to God than before.

XII.

"As relationship time to eternity bears,
And our earth-days are germs of the winterless years,
So the love of the Beautiful, planted within
The deep breast of humanity here, is akin
To the hope in the soul of immortal life there,
And, if nurtured aright, ripens taste into prayer,
And moulds art into worship. No dream of the brain,
No heart-longing for that which is lovely, is vain;
For the beautiful tends to develop the true,
And the true to the heavenly opens the view.

XIII.

"O, ye shadows of Calvary! Once through your gloom
The Unblamable One to the lowliest tomb
Passed in martyrdom glorified: must he again
Taste the gall-mingled cup for redemption of men?
Have the cycles of centuries run but in vain
Since was rent the great veil of the Temple in twain?

XIV.

"Though, O God of the nations, thy mercy be long;
Though thy anger be slow, as thy right arm is strong;
And though through the Incarnate One's love-laden word,
In just judgment falls not the sharp, up-lifted sword,
Yet we know through all time can not stern justice sleep;
Not fore'er can the Christ from dire punishment keep
The false peoples who, holding His Gospel in trust
For the world, have allowed it to trail in the dust,
And belied and betrayed it in bitterest shame,
And with cowardice base, and have made of His name

A safe refuge for error ; a cover for crime ;
An excuse for the sins of the bad of all time ;
A warm nest-egg for heresies, endless and numberless ;
A text for the infidel, tireless and slumberless ;
A football of dogma, for priests' bickerings ;
A convenient occasion for quarrels of kings ;
A pretext for republics from men rights to wrest,
Under guise of humanity,—demagogues, dressed
In robes statesmanlike, leaguing with prelates and sages
To mould into statutes the hatreds of ages.

XV.

"Tell me not there's no end for Art yet to attain,
While th' elect bride of Christ remains sundered in twain !
Say not, Art has no mission, while each faction stands,
Not with loving looks, clasping outstretched, friendly hands,
Like two sisters who self in His spirit deny,
And in love's fondly emulate rivalry vie ;
But with hate-heightened scowls, and a clutch fastened close
Each on throat of the other, but death can unloose !

XVI.

"Guest in Bethany welcomed, once more visit earth !
But not yonder, where magi brought gifts at thy birth ;
Not in Africa's gloom, nor in drowsy Cathay,
Thy blest visit repeated to hungered earth pay ;
But here, in the bright heart of enlightenment, be
Thy millenial advent, where men honor thee
With lip-service, while strewn in their hearts, cold and still,
Lie the memories sacred of Olivet's hill !
Preach once more, as thou didst among Judean rocks,
And the false shepherds tell, who are tending thy flocks,
O'er a literal gospel their brains straining hard,
To rank blasphemy turning thy symbolized word,

And employing thy precepts, with purview sublime,
And as broad as the sweep of the circuit of time,
In augmenting of wrangling and kindling of strife,
That 'the letter but kills, while the spirit gives life!'
As thou once didst rebuke, on Capernaum's coast,
Rebuke now the proud wisdom the scholiasts boast,
Who to-day of all learning broad doubt-channels make,
And the faith of the faithful by subtleties shake!

XVII.

. . . "Let us draw men from brooding on problems intense,
Which can never be solved in the dim realms of sense,
And a worship through forms of the beautiful teach;
For as well through the eye as the ear may we reach
The great heart of the world, which the true prophet's word
But awaits, to reverberant life to be stirred.
Let the lie into gaunt Dogma's teeth be hurled back,
On which Bigotry feeds in the centuries' track,
That Jehovah loves not to be worshiped in forms,
And desires but abasement of us mortal worms.
Though in manger born, yet claimed the Christ as his own
The grand Temple, and taught from the very same throne
Whose adornment God's self supervised; yea, thence spurned
Those its courts from their purpose divine who had turned.

XVIII.

"Let us rebuild the temple of Beauty once more,
Which late pagans have razed — its old glories restore.
Better rankest idolatry through all the earth,
Than theology giving perennial birth
But to heart-burnings, bickerings, hatreds, and feuds;
Better blind faith than spirit o'er Hades that broods;
Better on the 'high places' the images back,
Than refinements of thought which the God-essence lack."

XIX.

Then grew calmer his tone ; and like stars in dark skies,
With a softened look beamed his large, lustrous, black eyes ;
And he spoke of the future of Art, and the years
It must live 'neath a cloud ; of the scoffs and the jeers
That await those who seek to wed worship and art,
Till the day, in God's calendar true set apart,
When the mind of the world shall be fully prepared
Such a bridal to celebrate, Heaven-declared.

XX.

"Yet I know, that, as sure as the years are all God's,
Will the time come when Art, bursting up 'neath its clods,
Shall rebourgeon, and blossom, and fill all the earth,
And be first in men's minds, as 'tis first in true worth.
I am sure that through beauty shall purity come ;
I am sure that through harmony strife shall be dumb ;
I am sure that the core of humanity's heart
Will be sound when 'tis filled with the love of true art.
In those years peace shall reign under every star,
And mankind shall then blush for the ages of war ;
And no man shall stand forth with a claim to renown
For the slaughter of men, or ask fame's laureled crown
For the wasting of lands, and for ravaging homes,
Through the red hand of might, when that golden day comes."

XXI.

And thus closed the long monologue. Wrapped in a maze
Of awakened thought, dream, and delight, with the gaze
Of her deep eyes intently fixed still on his own,
Sat the brown maiden, noting each gesture and tone,
And his words well-nigh deeming inspired ; for they were
As a new revelation of truth and of duty to her.

With such eloquence had his voice pleaded the cause
Of a Christianized art, as in her to arouse
The enthusiasm but by such natures possessed ;
And she sat with her soul in her features expressed.
Had the words not then failed her to his to respond,
He had realized more than e'er yet how profound
Were the depths of her nature. Her soul's subtlest sense
Had been thrilled with his earnest and nerved eloquence.
Though he spoke as addressing her girlhood, yet she
In her womanhood felt the full force of his plea ;
And she longed for the language to him to reveal
What a woman can think, what a woman can feel.
Yet a something within her, she could not tell what,
(For most surely in words, as a rule, she lacked not,)
Clogged expression, and silence attentive she kept,
While a flood of confused feelings over her swept.

XXII.

Who shall tell whence arise, to the lips and the tongue,
Those strange moments of weakness, when thought-strains have rung
In our minds, while in impotent dumbness we stood,
Lacking words with the adequate meaning indued
To express them ? So easily, when past the hour,
Can we think what were said, had we then had the power !
Like the bugle-refrain sadly sounding retreat
When the day of a battle is dimmed with defeat,
Come these after-thoughts, trooping in silence and shade,
Past where lost opportunities' graves have been made ;
And by each striving soul thus regret's aftermath
Must be gleaned with the aloe that springs in life's path.

XXIII.

As her fresh, grasping mind comprehended the scope
Of the thoughts Mark had uttered, a new and great hope
Was to Helen's heart born : 'twas that she might be deemed
Fit to help in fulfilling this dream he had dreamed,—
To glean after this Boaz, a meek, humble Ruth,
In the harvest-fields whitened of duty and truth.



CANTO SIXTH.

REPUTATION.

I.

Sped the months.
Once again the fall-plowing was done ;
And two seasons of bronzing in wind and in sun,
And of toughening sinews, and hardening hands,
And appeasing with hearty food hunger's demands,
And of sleeping the sleep of the weary, had wrought
Such a change in Mark Landis as scarce would have thought
The good Doctor, with all his advice, possible,
When he bade Mark good bye, with presentiments full.

II.

But the signs in this year's later months had not been
To his health as propitious as last year's had seen ;
For the over-exertion he lately had made,
As amends penitential for courtesies paid
To the sweet prairie-maiden, had told on his frame ;
And to this may be added the conflict which came
In his breast when his intercourse with her commenced,
And had never abated. His heart he had fenced
With the strongest resolve, and his feelings had steeled
Against love's soft approaches, so as ne'er to yield
Unto even the faintest suggestion thereof ;
And had bent all his energies faithful to prove

To this purpose. The kind of an interest, rather,
In young sister taken by kind, watchful brother,
In Helen Mark took — or, at least, sought to take.
Ah! These brother-and-sister arrangements to make,
'Tis a far from safe thing for young persons to try,
When they wish to sail safely love's tanglements by.

III.

I presume that the fact may as well here be told,
That Mark Landis had found something taking strong hold
Of his heart, which was very like love; and the more
He endeavored to drive it away from his door,
The more stoutly it clung to the lintel. Still, still
Was the old story told, and o'er strongest of will
Nature gained one more triumph.
And while the old sun
Through yon archway his courses diurnal shall run;
While athwart night Orion shall sentinel stand;
While the sea shall caress or in rage smite the strand;
While the moon shall her quarters all noiselessly fill,—
Will the plaintiff the suit win of Heart versus Will.

IV.

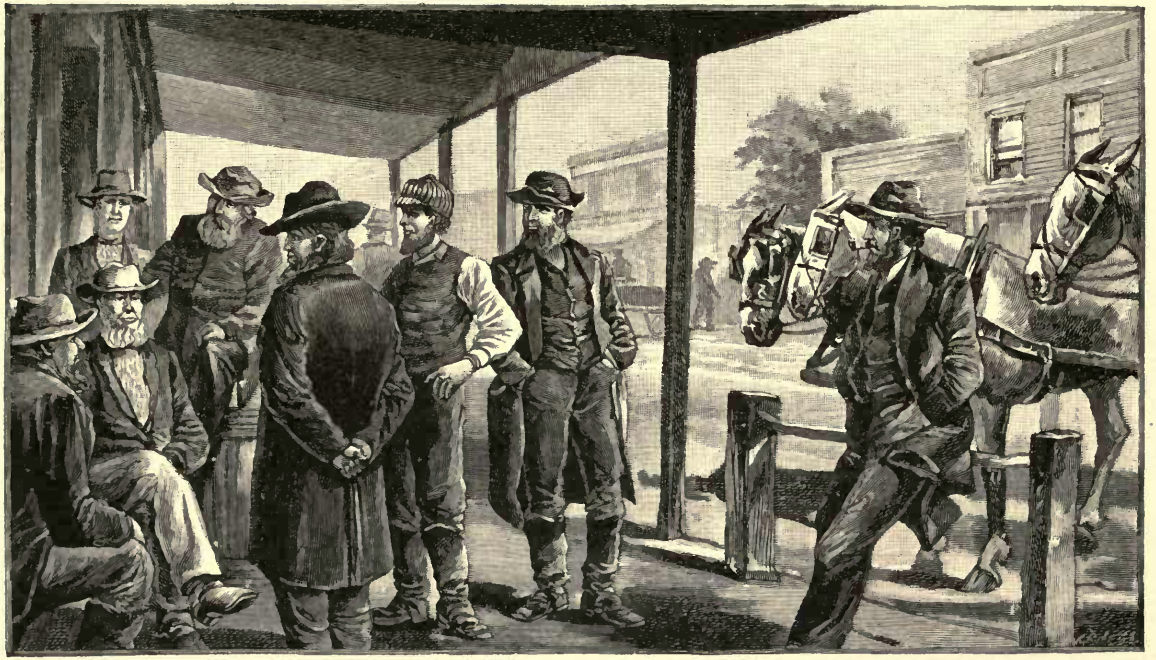
Mark was smitten in conscience.
"Was this, then, the length
Of his great resolution? Was this, then, the strength
Of his purpose?"
Ah, Mark, you are strong where may count
Mortal strength; but shame not at your failing to mount
Without wings to empyreal heights. You have proved
To be human, divine not at all. You have loved
As all mortals have loved since young Adam first blushed
When his heart with the new-born emotion was flushed.

V.

Such the cause of the storm that had raged in his breast,
Robbing him of his peace and his sore-needed rest,
Since the midsummer glories had gladdened the land ;
Yet his step had not faltered, nor wavered his hand ;
And to outward appearances he was as fresh
As the hawk newly sprung from the falconer's leash.
This was shown by the voice that expression found, when,
At the cross-roads, or corners, were gathered the men
Of the neighborhood.
For the male bipeds, be sure,
Have their talk-tournaments, where they closely scan o'er
And inspect all their neighbors' affairs, inside out
Turn them, air them, and shake them, and hand them about,
Quite as thoroughly and as assiduously
As the females ; the difference seeming to be
Merely this : that the men gossip 'neath the wide sky,
Where the wandering wind, as it sweeps idly by,
Catching up the discourse, bears it on and beyond,
And far out of humanity's gossiping bound ;
While the women their tales are 'twixt walls wont to tell,
And, confined, these brew discord, and into storms swell,
Which sweep down through the valleys of life, and lay waste
Hearts and hopes, and work wrongs that can ne'er be effaced.

VI.

Once, in front of the old country store, the high seat
Of the storied vicinity muse, and retreat
Of the plenal and versatile oracles found
In all places where wagging tongues human abound,
On a mild afternoon in the autumn's brown heart,
While the blackbirds were noisily piping their part,



Sat, on barrels, and boxes, and boards, as they could,
The select coterie of the whole neighborhood.

And the quails piping theirs, in the grand symphony
That great nature wrought out of her stored melody,
Sat, on boxes, and barrels, and boards, as they could,
The select *côterie* of the whole neighborhood.
And the theme that was up for discussion, this day,
Was Mark Landis's gifts in the farm-tilling way.
On the popular pulse his hard labor had told ;
Each voice rustic this cardinal virtue extolled ;
And the muscular multitude's sympathies showed
A most notable change since his land Mark first trod.

VII.

Farmer Graves, who decidedly stood at the head
Of the neighborhood thought, being questioned, thus said :
"It speaks fa'r for the day that we live in, my friends,
For a young man of talent and brain to seek ends
Like young Mark is pursuing. 'Old times come again,'
As we used in Kaintucky to say. It was then
That the highest ambition of youth was attained
When right fit to fill stations their fathers had gained ;
And then tilling the soil with success held a rank
Beside which the professions in dignity sank."

VIII.

"Es fur plowin' an' harrerin', plantin' an' hoein',"
Said rough Roger Robbins, "an' right down clean mowin',
An' cuttin' an' huskin', an' shockin' up corn,
He's a ripper an' staver, as sure as yer born."

IX.

"An' in rakin' an' bindin', an' loadin' on hay,
There's no man wants to tackle him over our way,"
Added big Elam Perkins, in voice loud and deep,
Which had never known silence, except in his sleep.

X.

Spoke old Farmer Dalrymple: "Now min' what I tell ye:
Ef yer takin' that chap fur a green 'un, he'll sell ye."

XI.

Quoth smart Jockey Hamestrap: "I'd go my whole pile
On his jedgment when't comes to a race of a mile."

XII.

"Got a heap o' horse sense," said the manager keen
Of the peripatetical threshing-machine.

XIII.

And the sage, periodical lightning-rod man
Had his say, the which something in this manner ran:
"I strike all sorts o' customers goin' my round,
An' I tell ye the beat o' him ain't to be found."

XIV.

So each one spoke his mind; and they all were agreed,
That the young Yankee farmer "would do." 'Twas decreed
Thus by Public Opinion.

My hat off I take,
As I pass, and a low, regulation bow make
To this power, in order to be in the fashion.
Though, if I must "wreak" my true "thoughts on expression,"
'Twixt you and me, reader, (not farther to go,)
I rate average public opinion down low —
Very low. 'Tis a Gessler, that places its hat
On a pole, and we freemen must bow down to *that;*
And woe be unto any poor son of the cliffs
Who shall seek to play Tell, with his *buts* and his *ifs:*
"Off with cap, varlet! Instantly all scruples swallow,
Or swift, vengeful punishment surely shall follow!"

XV.

In the course of two seasons, Mark Landis acquired
A repute after which he by no means aspired.
As free gift came to him a boon which to attain
Struggle thousands through soul-weary lives but in vain.
While his fame was not wide as the gates of the day,
It was patent, and loud, and intense, in its way;
And this is, after all, what most pleases the ear:
Hot ambition, impatient, loves rather to hear
Notoriety's howls welkin-echoes awake,
Than slow-earned judgments just, names immortal that make.

XVI.

But while Landis cared not for this neighborhood fame,
And no pleasure to him from its small glory came,
There was proof, in the way the pleased populace hollowed,
That the Doctor's advice had been faithfully followed.

XVII.

— Followed only too rigidly; for if, ahead
Looking, could the good Doctor the story have read
Of the fierce moral struggle, which still fiercer grew
In Mark's breast, he would surely have written anew
His prescription; as no human frame could sustain
Overlong both the mental and bodily strain
Which for months he had borne, and whose burden, at last,
Was too great to be longer endured.

XVIII.

On the past,
On the recent, sweet past, did his thoughts linger yet,
With a mingling of pleasure and poignant regret.
"O," he said to himself, "could this glad vision be,
What a wealth were in store in existence for me!

What excess of the beautiful, gentle, and true,
Over all I had dreamed! Will again on my view
Dawn a light such as this? Yet I ask for none here;
And hereafter — 'twill come, the hereafter, I fear,
All too quickly. Ah! Now, when 'tis weak in my grasp,
Life's boon, once underrated, I eagerly clasp."

XIX.

Then remorse lashed his soul with its scorpion whips.
"Why have I, with a lie's spirit liming my lips,
Talked to her of life, hope, ardor, beauty, and truth —
I, a shadow of death, and a ghost of lost youth?
Why have I placed myself before her, in the spring
Of her life, in her blossoming years — I, a thing
That to-morrow may be among things of the past,—
Challenging and inviting her love, which would last
Through the years, while I only endure for a day?
In her eyes I have read, methinks, love's dawning ray.
If aright I have read, then the more shame for me;
For so fatal a love for her never must be.
No, it never shall be! 'Twere a burning disgrace
To link my life of mold with that spirit of grace.
'Tis not too late to halt, though I've now gone too far."

XX.

He decided the question. For him and for her
The right thing to be done was to give her up now,
While he could with some graciousness; now, while the blow
She could bear; now, while strength was yet left him to break
The dear, wrongly forged chain; now, when she could awake
Without harm to her heart, from the dream; now, when earth
For her life such a field of bright promise held forth.

CANTO SEVENTH.

RENUNCIATION.

I.

It was Indian Summer.

O, muse that inspired
The charmed pen of him, ne'er by a base passion fired,
Who, in strains that will live while the plains of the West
Shall with each blooming spring be in fresh verdure dressed,
Of "The Prairies" sang when, in garb primal spread out,
They reflected the glory of Deity's thought;
Be with me while I stray with two mortals among
Scenes of beauty as bright as bard ever hath sung,
Which in this season nature doth richly unfold.
. . . Like a ruby-set diamond, bordered with gold,
Was each day of the radiant cluster that crowned
Such an autumn as seldom the sun in his round
Shines upon. The fields still were unshorn of their green;
Blossoms here and there still, the frosts scorning, were seen;
And the groves, with whose selvage the prairies were fringed,
Were with purple and scarlet and russet dyes tinged.

II.

The great bays of Mark Landis once more through the gate
Of the Graves farm had entered, and now stood in wait
For its pet and its pride.

When she came, Helen seemed
Robed in joy as in beauty, and from her eyes beamed

But the light of true happiness; then, as Mark dwelt
On the vision, for one glowing moment he felt
His stern purpose relax, while the old chains he wore,
And his spirit bent 'neath her enchantments once more.

III.

As the reins in his practised hands lightly he took,
Helen gazed at the beautiful team with a look
That she would not have dared to bestow upon him—
At the arch of their necks, and their cleanness of limb,
At the grace of their movements, the strength of their thews,—
'Twas a team, she thought, worthy to grace the Queen's mews.
On their lithe, supple bodies their muscles were laid
Far more neatly than finest robe Worth ever made
On the form of Parisian patron. And proud
Did they seem of their this day's additional load.
Ah! how lightly they lifted their feet as they stepped,
And what time as they flew o'er the prairie they kept!
With arched nostrils distended, and manes flowing free,
That bay team with its load was a rare sight to see!
So thought all of the farmers, as Landis drove by;
And each wife and each daughter, with penetrant eye,
Peered through door held ajar, or through lightly raised curtain,
And "*that* match" set down among human things certain.

IV.

Onward sped the bright bays. In each pulse of her frame
Helen Graves felt the life of the scene.
When they came
To a by-road that wound through a beautiful grove,—
Such a grove as no poet could see but to love,
In which Petrarch might, Laura adoring, have strolled,
Or which Virgil in golden verse might have extolled,—

The meandering course of the track Mark pursued,
Which seemed nowhere to lead save to depths of the wood.

V.

He now let the bays walk.
How the grove's still aisles rang
With the songs that the wood-birds from million throats sang!
It must surely have been that they o'erflowed with glee,
To have such listeners to their wild melody.
. . . Yes, good audience had they, these jubilant birds;
For, to Helen's perplexity, few were the words
That her escort had uttered yet during the drive—
He whose joy was in making occasion alive
With his superabounding discourse; while the tact
(Or unwisdom) to force conversation she lacked.
And thus sat these two beings, accordant in heart,
But in thought wide as utterest strangers apart.

VI.

Mark at length said, half musing:
"The songs these birds sing
Are the self-same refrains that they sang in the spring;
And they trill them in fully as cheerful a tone,
Though the days of their singing here soon will be flown.
Why were mortals not wiser, in tasting of joy,
Did they copy the birds, who detect no alloy
In their pleasure, and warble their strains while they may,
Ringing ever of hope and a happier day?"

VII.

This, expressed in unspeakable sadness of strain,
Helen's heart thrilled with keenest sensations of pain.
She responded not. Words had no meaning for her
In that moment. Her breast and her breath ceased to stir.

E'en her heart into silence was hushed.

What was this,
That was shaping in shadow to darken her bliss?
What was this, which like first cloud of tempest had sprung
In a trice, and her glowing sky now overhung?
In dumb terror she could but sit waiting until
The dread cloud-burst should come, and her sorrow-cup fill.

VIII.

He continued, while tender, and cadent, and low
Were the tones of his voice; and the tremulous flow
Of his now subdued speech was in contrast most strange
With the swelling, impassioned, and vehement range
Of his talk when discussing with ardor the themes
Of art, ethics, and life, and life's fancies and dreams:

IX.

"Helen Graves, the short year I have known you has been,
In the waste of my life here, an oasis green.
It has been a large comfort with you to commune;
It has seemed, when with you, that my heart was in tune
With the world. And the flattering spirits that wait
On the goddess of Hope have still kept me elate
With the thought of what might be if dreams were not dreams,—
With illusory visions they weave of the beams
Ever from their divinity's glance flowing forth,
To enchant and delude the weak children of earth.
. . . But these sirens no longer my soul with their strains
Must retain in their witchery's dangerous chains."

X.

Helen Graves's large eyes larger still seemed to grow,
And in wonderment o'er his whole being to throw
Inexpressibly delicate, charmed radiance,
As she turned full upon him her sweet, gentle glance.

And, Mark Landis, I trow that few men ever won,
Ere the book of a woman's heart open was thrown,
And ere love had the right of declarement, a gaze
Such as that which met yours in the soft autumn haze,—
A long look which embodied inquiry, surprise,
Sadness, longing, and doubt, and veiled faintly the eyes
With a mist which might melt into tear-drops, and prove,
With too strong demonstration, the presence of love,—
Yet did not; for she rallied, and mistress, once more,
Of herself, self-asserting, was calm as before.

XI.

He had paused, as in doubt. And, as Helen well knew
He ne'er halted for words, which sprang ever and flew
At his beck, she thought strange that this king of discourse
Should lack language to give his thoughts freedom and force.
. . . Durst she deem the embarrassment caused by the rush
Of love's tidal flood into his heart? A red flush
From hot hope at this trust-signal mantled her brow;
But it quickly retreated.

XII.

"No! were love aglow
In his breast," brooded she, "he had met me half-way,
When from due reserve went my eyes just now astray.
He would then have made captive my fluttering heart;
For 'twere his for the asking. 'Tis plain I've no part
And no lot in his love In *his* love? *Can* he love
With a love that enduring, sustaining, would prove?
. . . Ah, yes; he *his ideal* could love, could he find
Upon earth some epitome in womankind,
Bearing all of the graces and virtues; but me—
No, he ne'er can love me: that dream never can be."

And a sigh escaped from her, which vainly she tried
To repress.

XIII.

From the truth, in this world, oft how wide
Do the best of us get! Listen, Helen, and learn
What e'en your keen perception has failed to discern.

XIV.

Landis now thus resumed:

"For these many long days,
Helen Graves, in delight I have wandered your ways.
At the first, it was only the prankest of girls
That I saw, with great eyes, and a wealth of loose curls,
And a naïve, ingenuous air, which called forth
My alert sense of gallantry, ere of her worth
I knew aught; and she failed not to interest me
From the start, as a fresh, piquant, keen novelty.
But I looked 'neath the surface, and saw a mind filled
With original thought, and a heart that was thrilled
With emotions the deepest, and gentlest, and best;
And a soul, noble, lofty, and true, whose behest
Mind and heart ever duly obeyed; and there stood
Typed before me, not girlhood, but strong womanhood.
Then it flattered my pride that this woman gave ear
To the visions and fancyings I had held dear;
And the embryo cynic had gathered, at length,
From the girl under tutelage, vast spirit-strength."

XV.

The great bays now walked slowly; the birds' songs were low,
And, save them, the grove's silence seemed deeper to grow.
On his words she was hanging with bating of breath—
With intentness as fixed as the shadow of death.

XVI.

"I then found that the teacher had changed to the taught;
And that in me my pupil instruction had wrought
In a branch of life's learning wherein I was proved
To be greatly deficient. Taught thus, I have loved."

XVII.

Slower still were the steps of the bays. Not the trace
Of a breeze moved the air; and the birds for a space
Almost paused in their songs; while the boughs, interlaced,
Of the maples and sumacs a deeper shade cast.

XVIII.

"Yes, I've loved. I have erred. To myself I have done,
And to you, Helen Graves, [his gloved hand hers upon
Laying tenderly then,] grievous wrong.
"I have sought
Your acquaintance, and from its sweet web have I wrought
An attachment unpardonable.
"I came West,
For my o'erwearied, swift-beating pulse to seek rest,
Or get ready to die; with a flickering chance
That the climate my health and my strength might enhance.
I am still on the shadowy side of the test,
And an unsteady heart palpitates in my breast.
As I am, I've with love no concern, and no right
To palm off this burnt taper of life as a blight
Upon your fresh existence. One's self 'twere to lend
To the basest of uses.

XIX.

"And this, my dear friend,
Is what I for some time have been waiting to say
To your kindly and reason-bent ear; and to-day
Came the courage to me, my clear duty to do,
And the right, and the just, between God, me, and you."

XX.

Then he ceased.

The bays finally came to a halt
In a spot, in the heart of the grove, where a vault
Of the maples, and sumacs, and oaks, had been made;
And the thorn-apple trees, and wild grapes; and the shade
In the arbor which nature had formed was so dense,
And the silence that reigned so profound, that a sense
Of solemnity seemed the retreat to pervade,
And to sanctify this close, sequestered, rare glade,
While a feeling the tenant's whole being possessed,
As if waiting the presence of some angel-guest.

XXI.

His gloved hand was still resting on hers. He had talked
Hitherto with his eyes on his steeds as they walked,
As if counting their steps.

Now he turned in his seat,
And upon her face fell his full glance, there to meet
One that beamed in all gentleness, kindness, and—no,
Not in love—love that forth goes as carrier-doves go,
With an unrestrained sweep of their pinions as light
And as free as the air through whose realms they take flight;
For love's spirit had back from the windows withdrawn
Where its features a moment before had been shown;
And her look neither gleam of love-light nor one ray
Of her heart's wild impatience emitted. There lay
In the depths of her liquid, majestic, dark eyes
Such a calm as in ocean's abysmal deeps lies.

XXII.

Then she said:

"You have told me, Mark Landis, your tale.
'Tis as sad as the wailing of autumn's last gale.



The bays finally came to a halt
In a spot, in the heart of the grove, where a vault
Of the maples, and sumacs, and oaks had been made.

. . . You have loved; you have sacrificed; out of your heart
You have torn what had formed of existence a part.
This, the first and the only love you have e'er known,
From your casemated breast you've determinedly thrown,
At the bidding of duty. 'Tis brave; 'tis heroic;
'Tis worthy the soul of some classical stoic.

XXIII.

"I have this but to say, in response to what you
From your heart's secret chambers have brought forth to view:
That the kindness you've shown to the girl whom you met
In your path and befriended, she'll never forget.
It was yours, had you chosen, to humor her ways,
And to flatter her vanity through fulsome praise.
Yet you followed not after the way of the world;
And you told her her faults, not in censurings hurled,
Like sharp javelins, but to her reason appealing,
The things that 'twere better to strive for revealing.
And as you discerned, then, the out-reaching soul
Of the woman unfolding, you showed her the goal
Of true womanhood, and its reward. You would chide,
At times, when the mild chidings were wounding to pride;
But when chiding was past, you took her by the hand,
And showed where lies in sunshine Taste's beautiful land.

XXIV.

"And you held up for her the lamp Art keepeth bright,
To illume in earth's shadows things born in the light,
While she saw where the pathways of life might be made
All to blossom, if soul-true along them she strayed.
Then you told of a union of worship and art,
Which for her oped new vistas to soul and to heart,
And to life gave new purpose, a new garb to earth,
A new meaning to duty, to hope a new birth.

XXV.

"Though you may not have known that the person whose path
You thus strewed with blooms fairest earth's floral store hath,
Was with gratitude filled toward one who had given
To her strivings aims after which great souls have striven,—
Who with thoughtfulness rare had discerned the true need
Of a spirit deprived of its mentor, and freed
From restraint when most requisite, and who had made
Of her life something more than a light masquerade,—
'Tis a pleasure to tell you that such is the case.
From the tablet of memory naught can efface
Any word you have uttered since we two first met.
What the heart treasures most, the mind cannot forget."

XXVI.

Here she paused.
Had she uttered too much? Thus she asked
Of herself. Was it wrong that her spirit still basked
In the sunlight his presence diffused?

XXVII.

O, tell me,
Who shall set the true bounds of the heart's modesty?
Who shall mark where expression must yield to reserve?
Who shall point where emotion should lead, and where serve?
Who shall tell when heart-treasures, long hidden away,
May be brought forth and shown in the broad light of day?
Who shall say when the tones of the tenderer cords
Of the harp of the heart may be swelled into words,
Through which waiting affection's long-muffled refrains
May break forth into music's soul-comforting strains?
. . . Who these queries with full satisfaction shall solve,
May the fair Helen Graves's equation resolve.

XXVIII.

But *sufficit*, that what from the heart she had said,
Had stirred up to rebellion the realm of the head.
Swift thought swept through her brain. Prudence, taking alarm,
Sharp analysis made, and found boding but harm
The advance she had ventured. Propriety weighed
And found wanting the utterance warm she had made.

XXIX.

"He asks not whether *I* have loved *him*, or have not!
Does he know? Does he care, the least tittle or jot?
Before casting me from him, why does he not show
He has had at least some sort of claim to me? . . . No!
That I ne'er should have said! Let him ask if I love—
Not so coolly assume it! I may make you prove
Your position, proud autocrat! . . . O, that he'd give
To my starved heart a chance to tell him that I live
But to love him! — that death, should it come, would but crown
The affection eternal that laughs at death's frown!
Having thus spoken once with his soul, face to face,
I could bear aught of trouble, grief, pain, or disgrace;
I could sacrifice, yield, bend, renounce, or deny;
I could wait upon hope; I could live; I could die;
Whatsoever should be his thought, quest, or behest,
Be it life, death, or death-in-life, that were the best,—
'Twere to me all in all: that, indeed, were earth's end—
Unto death with him, husband, or lover, or friend!"

XXX.

Then she turned to Mark Landis, who silent had sat,
Waiting still on her words, which were glad music yet

To his heart; looked as searchingly into his eyes
As she durst for some sign that to her might suffice
To lift gently the latch of the door of his heart,
Therein enter, and be of its rich life a part;
But looked vainly.
And now the revolt in her breast
Gained in strength; and she said, in her rebel unrest,
What were better said never—so prone are we all,
On occasion, to say what voice ne'er can recall,
And what years of regret, howe'er deeply they groove,
From the records where registered cannot remove!

XXXI.

"Then, Mark Landis, you thought what my gratitude meant
You had read, and read rightly, as dawned no dissent;
And you learned how to pity me; though you learned not
The deep lesson through all love's experience taught,
That contemned most by women within the heart's realm
Is the pity bestowed when assumed sorrows whelm.
For you doubtless presumed that the woman you taught
In life's wisdom, and lead to new regions of thought
In an atmosphere earth's common life far above,
Had with you in the web of so fatal a love
Been entangled, while on the charmed plant she had fed
Whose beguiling, sweet essence her heart had thus led
Into languor; and so you served merciful notice
Upon her, no longer to eat of this lotus."

XXXII.

"And surely," he pleaded, "what was it but kind,
To give warning thus?"

XXXIII.

"Nothing. I've no fault to find
With your thoughtful compassion; but merely suggest,
That, in case, though susceptible, she to her breast

Such a phantom had never yet clasped, as a love
Of the nature of this one most surely must prove,—
In case she of the lotus-plant had not partaken,—
Occasion there were none her heart to awaken
To any particular danger that lies
In her path."

XXXIV.

She was through. She did not rest her eyes
Then upon him, in angry, or scornful, or grieved
Earnestness, as from sense of injustice received;
But she turned them away, with a feeling of guilt;
And her words had not died before she would have knelt
Unto him, and with face in the dust pardon craved,
Had he only in sweet ruth the way for her paved.

XXXV.

The blow, well aimed, with force most effective came down.
Mark received it in silence. No murmur was drawn
From his lips, as the barbed arrow into his heart
Pierced, and wrought there its own keenly exquisite smart.

XXXVI.

At the stake when the martyr the fagot awaits,
To his spirit unbent through the Beautiful Gates
Glimpses come of a crown for him there held in store;
Grafting glory to come on the pain of the hour.
To the patriot dying for country comes death
Robbed of half of its terrors, if, yielding his breath,
He can see the bright banner in victory wave
Which his blood is poured out to defend or to save.

XXXVII.

Helen, know, a grace martyrdom hath of its own:
Robbing it of this grace, you humiliate one

Who his spirit joy's beggarly remnant denies,
And presents his true heart for the dread sacrifice.
'Tis the savage alone who indignity heaps
On the captive for torture's refinement he keeps.
Befits vengeance no heart unto womanhood leal,
Nor accords it with aught learned from Madame Marsile.

XXXVIII.

But Mark saw on her part no such vengeful intent,
And addressed to himself this severe argument:
"With love blind, I was fain to dispel the fond charm
Of the dream that I deemed to her heart boded harm;
But I find that myself am the dreamer deceived,—
That alone of fond fancies a web I have weaved,
Which enmeshes but my credent heart, leaving hers
All as free as the breeze that these autumn leaves stirs.
What have I to complain of? The end I had sought
Is attained. The affair I have honestly brought
To an issue, and she, as I hoped for, therefrom
With her heart unimpaired by love's struggle has come."

XXXIX.

Yet this argument stilled not his heart.

Reader mine,
Hearts love-stricken how many in count, dost opine,
In the sweep of the years since earth's primeval spring,
Have been soothed by assuagement that logic could bring?
Count the mortals who've looked upon Deity's face;
Count the prophets who fleckless have blossomed in grace;
Count the eras when peace hath prevailed throughout earth;
Count the famed who are held at exactly their worth:
Of the aggregate then a fair average take,
And approach to the sought-for result thou may'st make.

CANTO EIGHTH.

FRIENDSHIP.

I.

"Now for home, my bright beauties!" at length Landis said.
"Come, my pets! my Boy Charley! my Gentleman Ned!
Do you see, lads? The sun is far down in the sky,
And you'd grumble should I let your suppers go by;
For the stomach of beast must be ever supplied,
Like the craving heart human, let what may betide.
Like as not you are wondering, my bonny pair,
Why we're halting so long in this resting-place rare:
And, indeed, it were difficult giving a reason,
Except 'tis to taste the last joys of the season.
For, my chums, it is very few drives more we'll take,
Ere the gladdening sunshine these groves will forsake;
And the chill, cutting blasts, sweeping fields bleak and drear,
And cold, comfortless rains, and harsh frosts, will be here;
And, like friendship untreasured, or love unrequited,
By winter's iced breath autumn's heart will be blighted."

II.

Helen marked, when he called his steeds each by its name,
What a cognizant look to their glowing eyes came:
How their ears were thrown back, as his language they heard,
Spoken *to* them, not *at* them. He uttered each word
So distinctly, so low, in so gentle a tone,
That as well his bay's hearts as their ears were his own.

And, when stopping to water them, crossing a stream
That, like music's strains heard in a half-waking dream,
Issued, purling, from out of the heart of the grove,
While re-checking them, plainly he told them their love
(Than a woman's love, thought he then, far less complex)
Was returned; for he patted their heads and their necks,
The while murmuring tenderly into their ears
Words nor woman nor beast e'er reluctantly hears.

III.

"Ah!" sighed Helen, as, watching these movements of his,
In the carriage she sat amidst sad reveries;
"Would he but myself treat as he does a dumb beast,
My heart hungered would sit at a royal love-feast."
She grew jealous of this prancing team of Mark's pride,
And for her to green seemed the bay steeds to be dyed.

IV.

'Twas but little they said on the homeward return.
. . . The horizon with sunset fire ceasing to burn,
The thin mantle of twilight was o'er the earth thrown,
While as yet night refrained from reclaiming her own.
Soon the grove's deepened shadows were left far behind,
And across the broad prairie, with speed of the wind,
And along the smooth, turf-lined, and dew-dampened road,
Sped the great Landis bays, with their marvelous load,—
With their lading of beauty and truth interwreathed;
With their lading of love that was breathed and unbreathed;
With their lading of memories richer than gold;
With their lading of soul-deep emotions untold;
With their lading of pangs, disappointments, and fears;
With their lading of wrecks of crushed dreams of the years;
With their lading of words that brought pain in their course;
With their lading of sorrow, regret, and remorse;

With their lading of longings dispelled with a breath;
With their lading of hopes lost in shadows of death.

V.

Speed on swiftly, Boy Charley! Speed, Gentleman Ned!
For a freight such as this you have never yet had,
And may ne'er have again! In the vehicle whirled
O'er the glad, green expanse nature here has unfurled,
Bearing, mingled together, yet strangely apart,
Thought of brain, hope of soul, and emotion of heart,
Grievings, cloud-drifts of trouble, and burdens of care,
Hearts unbalmed, wrongs unrighted, and shapes of despair,
A true symbol forth-shadowed there seemeth to be
Of life's barque sailing over time's far-sweeping sea.

VI.

Helen Graves! There is time for you yet to retract!
Words of yours have brought wounding! They will retroact!
And, as sure as God lives, ere the years roll away,
Soon or late, with the very same wound which this day
You have dealt to Mark Landis your own breast shall bleed.
In the hush of this softening twilight take heed!
Is it well to slay love in the house of its friends?
Over love's bleeding form is the place for amends!
Let your heart plead for kindness and grace. Look ahead:
Count the years that may flow o'er the face of its dead
Ere so wealthy a spirit again yours shall greet,
Ere so gentle a Mentor your footsteps shall meet.

VII.

Yet once more, Helen Graves! Let fair honesty plead!
You have been indirect—spoken words to mislead;
Have been false to yourself, and false witness have borne
Of your heart to Mark Landis. In justice now turn,

And do right to yourself, and to him! If you part
In the shadows, O, let them be such as the heart
Can enshrine in its crypts, with dead years that were blest,
And not such as will haunt you like ghosts of unrest!
To your soul let the precepts of wisdom appeal
Which came e'er from the lips of dear Madame Marsile.
. . . Helen! Though in your seasons of scorn you may try
Still to feed your poor famishing heart with a lie,
You will never succeed — stones will not do for bread;
And some morn you may waken and find it is dead!

VIII.

. . . Will she yield? . . . Ah! Still deepens the twilight, and star
After star peeps through gates of the heavens ajar;
And she still remains silent, or merely responds
To the causual questionings Landis propounds,
To kill time.
Yes, yes; such was the object of both;
And thus each to speak words that were earnest was loth.
. . . To kill time!—They in spirit were putting to death
Something greater than time, something dearer than breath!
For the love that is true love laughs year-count to scorn;
And the love that is pure love is not mortal born:
'Tis no more to be tried by the time-tests of earth,
Than it is to be gauged by man's standard of worth.

IX.

Speed, speed on, Charley Boy! Speed on, Gentleman Ned!
The faint hope of a heart-reconcilement seems fled!
Make all haste, lads, their homes and your stable to reach;
For the sooner their farce ends, the better for each!

X.

Now, the charmed, tender hour of the twilight is gone;
All the stars have appeared, with their diadems on;
And in silver the moon is all robed for her march
Through the planet-gemmed, world-lighted triumphal arch.
'Tis a night full of beauty, and glory, and truth;
Such a night as makes age feel immortal in youth;
Such a night, peradventure, as smiled on the earth
When the shepherds were told of the Promised One's birth.
But it should have been dark as old Egypt's dense night:
Not a star should have proffered its genial light
To guide over the breakers these self-sundered souls,
Making wreck thus upon misconstruction's rough shoals.
For 'twere better in silence and darkness to be,
Than to let the pure starlight such sacrilege see.

XI.

The long drive nears an end, as all earth-jaunts must do;
And the lights of the Graves farm are coming in view.
. . . Slacken speed, handsome bays! For a recognized thrill
Of the reins tells you such is your young master's will.
Yet still slower, lads! There, that will do—a slow walk.
You must see he has clearly, beside the dull talk
Which has been dragging on, something earnest to say;
And your hankered-for suppers you'll have to delay.

XII.

. . . Landis said, as he turned toward Helen a look
Which of utterest heart-desolation partook:
"Have you been, like myself, in this silence-charmed hour,
With its beauty impressed, its sublimely weird power?
Have you felt that God comes at such hours near to earth,
And his benison gives to all mortal of birth?"

XIII.

"Yes," she answered, with thrill of hope-waking surprise;
"I have drunk of the draught;" and her soul filled her eyes.
"It is glorious! While o'er the prairie we've flown,
Such a joy in the sight as I never had known
I have had, though I oft feast with raptured delight
On the scene. Greater beauty, I think, has the night,
Than the kingliest day."

XIV.

"If not so," he replied,
"It is holier. And in this calm eventide,
With the hallowing trace of God's kiss on its brow,
Helen Graves, let me ask for your friendship—not now,
Simply, but I shall need it in years that pass o'er—
And it may be but months ere I need it no more!
Be it months, be it years, that are yet mine to be,
'Twill be little for you; 'twill be vast wealth for me.

XV.

"An assured larger life may soon open for you,
And your broadened horizon diminish the view
Of the scenes which have been to my vision so fair,
And have caused life to me a new aspect to wear.
'Tis across the new years that my hand I now reach,
And implore in your hall of remembrance a niche.
My life here will in lines that are narrow be cast:
There will be naught to sunder the present and past
In my heart, except death."—
Helen shrank, then, as though
A chill wind, with the grave-damp bedewed, had swept through
Between his soul and hers.—
"Your existence will be
With diversified interests filled; and of me

If you think, it will be an exceptional task
Of the mind; that exception is all that I ask.
'Twill no strain be for me to remember: indeed,
To forget were work sorest for heart as for head.
I recall your own words, whose refrain lingers yet:
'*What the heart treasures most, the mind cannot forget.*' ''

XVI.

The deep blush which then mantled her cheeks and her brow,
By the kindly connivance the fates oft allow
Of the moonlight and starlight, was hid from his view;
And he only observed that the light brighter grew
In her dark, glowing eyes, which upon him she turned,
With a look in which no heart-resentment yet burned,
As she said, in deep tenderness, kindness, and ruth,
And a tone that rang full of her old-wonted truth:

XVII.

''You shall never, Mark Landis, knock twice at my breast
For a boon, if it be such, that's yours without quest.
You have asked for my friendship in years yet to come:
It is yours in all years, until language be dumb,
Until memory fade, until heart-throbs be stilled.
With *your* friendship a void in my life you have filled,
And my own lies for you to retain at your will;
While its life naught can threaten, its heart naught can chill.
There is nothing Mark Landis can do to life's end,
That aught else can of Helen Graves make than his friend.''

XVIII.

O, Mark, how could you fail to discern in these tones,
Each one vibrating only with feelings love owns,
The last struggle her heart for assertion was making—
Its last earnest effort put forth at awaking

Love's sharp inquisition and search on your part—
Her despairing attempt to creep into your heart?
At that moment supreme, had you stood at death's door,
With but one day to live ere the struggle be o'er,
And in challenging love then demanded of her,
For the faint shred of life that were yours to transfer,
Her great heart, with its volume of health, youth, and bloom,
It had gladly and proudly been yours to the tomb.

XIX.

. . . Farmer Graves's great barn is now looming in sight,
And his poplars and maples; while grandly the light
From the roomy and old-fashioned fireplaces glows
Through each window unscreened, and its ruddy light throws
On the beautiful bays, with their precious life-load,
Coming on a proud trot, turning in from the road,
And then up to the farm-house.

XX.

What contrast is there,
In the scene now confronting this dream-wakened pair,
With the deep heart-experiences of the drive!
No life here but is active,—each creature alive
And alert. From the regions of pure sentiment
To the strata of fact, quick has been the descent!

XXI.

O, the life of a farm at day's close! Then and there
One will find of this world an epitome fair.
See the hard-working beasts, that come up for their pay,
And receive it in silence, eat, drink, and away,
Like good, orderly workmen. The idle ones howl,
And, like all idlers human, grunt, grumble and growl,
More by far than those who, in pain, struggle, and sweat,
Honest, fairly-earned titles to maintenance get.

And the dainty, select ones, the favored of pride,
These demand closer care than all others beside;
For they, favorite-like, must be petted, caressed,
And of all things provided they must have the best.
And the bullies and tyrants come in for their shares,
Which they take with the rest, and then plunder in pairs,
Coward-like, and combine to grab, ravage, and rob,
And resort to that civilized trick, the swell-mob,
The unwary to plunder, and leave them to starve,
While their own greedy, gluttonous bellies they serve.
. . . Bless me! This is so like the vast human charade,
As we see it all round us in varied guise played,
That it comes of earth's problems to be not the least,
Whether beast after man takes, or man after beast.

XXII.

When Mark Landis, while round him the white moonbeams played,
To the ground Helen lightly had lifted, he said,
As her hand he released:
"Well, good night, and good bye!"

XXIII.

"Why good-bye?" Helen asked, with quick glance of the eye,
While a shudder her heart, wrought to tension, ran through:
"On a journey, then, are you intending to go?"

XXIV.

"Not at all," he returned. "This is but my last greeting
To a dream I have had, and have learned to be fleeting.
I found it so fair, and so bright was its spell,
That I pay it its due of a passing farewell,
As its hues iridescent now fade from my sight,
And its joys disappear in oblivion's night."

XXV.

"Helen Graves but good night has to say," she replied,
As he sprang to his seat, while straight supperwards hied,
With the same speed at which o'er the prairie they sped,
The gay, bright Charley Boy, and spruce Gentleman Ned.

XXVI.

. . . On the steps of her home still poor Helen remained,
With her eyes after horses and driver long strained;
And when trace there was none of Mark's form to be seen,
She gazed up at the heavens, whose beauty serene
Now was heightened; and still as a statue she stood,
While the moonlight in silver waves over her flowed,
As, exiled on a lone, desert isle, one might stand,
And watch sail the last ship for his loved native land.
. . . She yet gazed at the stars. "Tell, O, tell me," she sighed;
"May not love without end in your clear depths abide?
For enduring abiding-place none hath it here!"
And upon her white hand there fell softly a tear.

XXVII.

She retired to her chamber, and sought the relief
That no woman fails ever to seek.
But a grief
Such as this which now shrouded the fair Helen Graves,
Departs not with much weeping; for after the waves
Had rolled surgingly over her heart in their might,
Came a calm with more dread than the storm in its height.

CANTO NINTH.

DEVOTION.

I.

Richard Rolfe, gentle reader: who enters as one
Of my characters truest. And, ere I go on
With my tale, let me linger awhile o'er this man,
Who in no wise on any original plan
Had been formed, as I frankly admit at the start.
He was no unique soul, living grandly apart
From the crowd, but one such as you're likely to meet
Fifty times in the day, along any thronged street
Where our countrymen mingle. I purpose in him
But a type of American nature to limn,
Which, though common as love, is, like love, genuine,
And of which any counterfeit rarely is seen.

II.

Richard Rolfe was a man of to-day. Of the things
That to memory's treasury yesterday brings
He cared little, and less for the glamour hope throws
O'er things which in the lap of to-morrow repose.
The great past was to him something distant and dead,
Over which he passed ever with reverent tread,
But whose spirit with his no communion could hold,
Savor bearing too strong of mortality's mold.
Of the lessons that history's record unfolds,
Or the mirror of promise that prophecy holds,

His soul being oblivious, chose to adhere
To its plenary faith in the now, and the here.
With the thoughts of this flush life his active mind teemed;
And, in waking or sleeping, he never had dreamed
Of a world any better than this where he lived,
Loved, hoped, labored, or strove, and in which he believed,
With its every error, injustice, and wrong,
With a faith as unquestioning, fervent, and strong,
As that placed by a tender young child in its mother.

III.

—Of course, this refers but to time.
In another,
And happier world, far beyond the dark gulf
Which he knew that some day he must cross, Richard Rolfe
Did most surely believe, as his fathers had done—
With such modifications of faith, be it known,
As the spirit of this age had wrought; for to him
'Twas decidedly proper to vary and trim
His theology, as ballad-singers their rhymes,
To comply with the changing demands of the times:
That to him was the truth, with regard to eternity,
Which had most respectable modern paternity.

IV.

Yet a nature was Rolfe's of so sound mental health,
Of such heart-freshness, and so much physical wealth,
That this superabundance of life, strength, and nerve,
And his vast fund of energy held in reserve,
Gave him influence, power, and control among men,
Such as few at his age can command; for he then
Had not thirty years reached; and 'twas worthy of note,
That e'en thus long he'd been on life's high tide afloat,

And unpromised as well as unwedded was still;
For of him one would say, he could conquer at will
Any heart to lay siege to which he might desire.
He had all of the traits woman's love that inspire:
He had courage, assurance, persistence, and force;
He had strong self-assertion; a plethoric purse;
A commanding, tall person; an eye passion-fired;
And most soft, winning ways, when occasion required.

V.

Richard Rolfe had long known Helen Graves. From a child
He had watched her, as, heedless, and curbless, and wild,
She had roamed o'er the prairies in May or in June,
Picking strawberries where they were lavishly strewn
By God's own kindly hand in dim cycles of time,
And by countless suns sweetened for man in his prime;
Or through groves in mid-August, where blackberries grew
Thickly, darkly, as plagues that doomed Egypt once knew;
Or the round, toothsome hazelnut tempted her on,
Until lost in the thickets of purple and brown.
He had missed her when absent at school, and had thought
That an object, some day, she would be to be sought;
But, with that easy confidence in his own power
With which fate the courageous doth ever endower,
Waited till she should ripen to woman's estate,
When he deemed it quite likely he might link her fate
With his own.

VI.

. . . On the night when Mark Landis returned
From the long drive with Helen, and with him, inurned,
Brought the ashes of trust that with reverent care
He had after the sacrifice gathered, to bear

Through the seasons and years, Farmer Graves at his gate
Stood, discussing with Rolfe themes of soil and of state,
As the spanking bays pranced at brisk pace proudly in,
And their master the treasure laid down, which to win
He, Dick Rolfe, had deemed but a light task.
"A smart span
Landis drives!" In this wise the old man's comments ran,
As the bays trotted homeward. "As sure as my name
Is John Graves, since that thar right clean-brained Yankee
came
To these parts, I have never seen him hold the reins
On a roadster that hadn't good blood in its veins."

VII.

There's a cheapness of feeling comparison brings,
Which humiliates even the spirit of kings.
Proud Dick Rolfe felt shrink up the lean roan he bestrode
To still lanker proportions, as homeward he rode,
At a whip-enforced gait. But the beast, if possessed
Of the gift given Balaam's, a voice to protest,
Might have told him how grossly unworthy it was
To torment a poor brute in green jealousy's cause.
. . . The truth was that Dick had on a sudden awaked
To a keen apprehension of this striking fact:
That a beauty like sweet Helen Graves could not range
Long at random in this Western world's pasture-grange,
Without danger of being caught up and "coralled";
And, aroused thus, his haughty, impatient breast swelled
With inflamed indignation that e'er living wight
Of a herdsman should venture to challenge his right
To the pride of these grazing-lands; while, in his wrath,
Had he met the intruder that night in his path,
Elsewise might have been told my tale.

VIII.

As he had cast
A look searching at Helen, when by him she passed
On that last night for her by Mark Landis's side,
She, with features by thought-trials fresh purified,
And full bathed in the moonlight, to him seemed more fair
Than in all seasons since they had breathed the same air.
Thus, as grew on his vision this late-discerned charm,
New emotions gained power his strong nature to warm,
And he stood there, stirred deeply.

IX.

And then he began
To feel strange and soft pulsings of heart, while there ran
Through his being a stream of new joy, and new life;
And he knew that he loved.

There sprang now a fresh strife
In his breast—love, hard struggling for instant control,
Crying, with first love's fierce cry: "Give all, heart and soul;
Give me all, or give none!"

X.

Richard Rolfe was no man
Long to hesitate after once forming a plan;
But prompt action so quickly succeeded resolve,
That small time had he thoughts in his mind to revolve.
Therefore, when he reached home, he had fixedly planned
To win fair Helen Graves as his bride, out of hand.

XI.

. . . Thus the stars on that night o'er the prairies looked down
On three hearts with love's strong tidal wave overflown;

And the stars then, as ever, their secrets close kept,
And their courses still held, whether love laughed or wept,
Or love suffered or joyed, or love triumphed or fell.
But one tale, O cold worlds, have ye ever to tell!
Ye can tell that love times, days, and seasons hath not;
Ye can tell that to bleed and be bruised is its lot;
Ye can tell that forever love's tide ebbs and flows;
Ye can tell that young ever, old never, love grows.
This enduring tale love in your depths aye can read;
But not that which to know it e'er thinketh to need:
It can never read there what its travail shall bear,
It can never read there what its spirit shall share;
It can never read there of one pulse of a heart
That it treasures in silence and worships apart;
It can never from thence one assured omen wring
Of the bloom or the blight which the morrow shall bring.

XII.

Now prepare, Helen Graves, for a siege to your heart!
He who lays it, though meeting repulse at the start,
Will bring all of love's forces to bear on your breast,
And its dread engines will into service be pressed.
O, beware, Helen Graves! Your heart's fortress make strong:
For the siege will be weary, the siege will be long!
Reinforce all your bastions, make sure each redoubt,
If you hope against siège like this still to hold out!

* * *

XIII.

"Hello, Dick!" Farmer Graves in his frank way exclaimed,
Not a great many days after Richard had framed
His strong purpose beneath aroused passion's fierce gleam,
As the latter drove up with a fine chestnut team,

And invited the former to sit by his side,
While together his new trotters' paces they tried.
"I'm right glad, neighbor Rolfe, that you've put on the road
Creatures such as these beauties. It does my heart good
To ride after them!

"Thanks! I don't mind if I do
Try the lines. Ah! These nags are a credit to you;
And I reckon they'll give to young Landis's bays
A close rub. We must try the pa'r one of these days.
It's some time since I've seen him. Some persons here say
He's consumptive, with health mighty nigh giving way,
From his over-exertion."

XIV.

"I hope, sir, his case
Is by no means as bad as reported. His place
Could be in our community poorly supplied,"
Answered Rolfe, in whose breast all resentment had died
Toward Landis of late; for there had, through the mouth
Of Dame Rumor, came word which first made Dick less wroth
With his neighbor, and then a warm friend of him made.
The word went, that Mark, learning his rival had laid
Claim to Helen's affection, concluded to yield,
Like a sensible fellow, to Richard the field,
More especially as Helen's heart was inclined
To Dick, having thereon plainly spoken her mind.
And the fact that Rolfe now was attentive to her,
And that she seemed to give to her new worshiper
All her favors, while Landis had totally ceased
In his visits, the credit still greatly increased

Of the story; and—would you believe it?—it stood
Soon as good history in the whole neighborhood.
But I vouch for the fact that, within my brief day,
I've myself, in this very identical way,
Seen made histories vast, which the world has believed,
And with questionless faith all their data received.

XV.

And here taketh my muse a *détour* from the thread
Of the tale, for the moment a by-path to tread,
As the sons of men ever are turning aside
From life-themes to contemplate things cast by the tide
On the shore of the River of Time, as it runs
Through the valleys of earth and through courses of suns.
. . . Who of woman born breathes that is able the line
With distinctness and adequacy to define
Between flexile tradition and tense history,
Through humanity's maze and fate's dim mystery?
Task Promethean! He who essays it may well
Bid adieu to the hope in peace mental to dwell.
Fellow-traveler through this vale tearful, I trow
That both you and I groping in twilight will go,
While the fancy delusive embracing that we
Shall truth clarified e'er in earth's chronicles see.
We are born in a shade; shadows ever attend
Our steps mundane; the mists never fail to descend
Upon us from the cradle e'en on to the tomb;
And the haze of futurity deepens death's gloom:
But no mists round life's path more persistently crowd,
Than those which the page storied incessantly shroud.
The exact truth of history ever to gain,
And to separate it from tradition, in vain

Need be looked for in this sphere, while human
Man continues to be, and especially woman.

XVI.

There's a rule the world over observed by mankind
On the subject in hand, which may thus be outlined:
The traditions that buttress *my* faith, or *my* cause,
Pass as history credent with *my* side, while those
Which sustain faith or cause propagated by *you*,
Can for *me* web nor woof make of history true.
This rule governs the problem historic; and, tried
Vice versa, props equally *your* chosen side.
We all work by it—poets, priests, worldlings, and sages,
Whether on topics current, or those of the ages.
'Tis the way of the world, brother; so hath it been
Since ran rippling the streams and the grasses grew green;
And 'twill so be while gently at eve Hesper glows,
Or sweet Luna o'er earth silver radiance throws.
. . . Would you change it? For things planned anew do you yearn?
Philanthropic day-dreamer! As well seek to turn
The blood's currents out of their arterial course
To and from life's unceasingly pulsating source,
Or to soften and smoothe the gnarled growth of the oak,
Make the reed strong to bear the wild hurricane's stroke,
Change in nature the lily by clasping airs swayed,
Or the daisy that blushes demure in the shade.

* * *

XVII.

With his brave, blooded chestnuts the few final days
Of the fall Rolfe with Helen improved. And the haze

Which still lingered, as if tender thoughts to retain
That in autumn days dreamy, in memory's train,
Cluster round gentle hearts, she held dear as the glow
Of the sunset to him who shall nevermore know
The glad warmth of another sun's light.
Though she drove,
Rode, or walked with him whither he asked her, in grove,
Or on prairie, o'er meadow, by pond, or by stream,
While her mind was awake, yet her heart lived a dream.
She was charming in converse; ranged ever thought-free;
And especially comforting was it that he,
Whom she knew to be anchored in spirit inside
The safe harbor of life's living present, ne'er tried
To invade the to her hallowed precincts that lay,
Ah, behind her fore'er, and so far now away!
There was health for her spirit in topics he chose;
And, while naught of her heart was she forced to disclose,
In reality's fields she drew him, 'neath her spell,
Along paths where the sunshine in plethora fell.
. . . But at times—ah, antithesis marvelous, found
In the fairest of women within the bright bound
Of green earth!—she herself, moved by some impulse strange,
Drew him off from the wonted, habitual range
Of such earnest themes as, with no lack of fair phrase
He embellished, to those of an alien phase.
Was this only to show what o'er him was the power
She possessed? Be that still as it might, hour by hour
Grew her vantage. She led him to talk of all things
In the scope of the known; yea, of mystical springs
Of the unknown her captive enticed to converse,
Still in all ever holding the helm of discourse.

XVIII.

She was fain to beguile his strong spirit away
From the fresh *terra firma* of Now, and To-Day,
To the fringed shores of Sometime, and Yesterday's isles,
And the tropics where slumber To-morrow's bright smiles;
And he listened enchanted, and, listening, loved,
With a love that all heights and all depths in him moved.

XIX.

Yet, whene'er, with heart-eloquence glowing, he sought
To direct the discourse into channels of thought
Which flowed into the great stream of love, by finesse
She diverted its course to where danger was less;
And thus kept herself on the assured safety side;
While, becharmed, and thus still floating on with the tide,
This live non-dreamer, now dreaming only, swept on,
And was lost to all else save her look, touch, and tone.

XX.

Ah, well, Helen! Just now you are having your way.
But this sleeper will wake from his slumbers some day;
And that day you will not find relief in finesse;
But the issue you then will have boldly to face.
And, pray, what will you do, Helen Graves, in that day?
Will you float with the tide idly ebbing away,
Or, on moveless rock standing, defy it?

Not long
Can, you, Delilah, dally with Samson the strong!
For your temple's stout pillars he'll shatter at length,
When again he shall rise, and shall feel his old strength.

XXI.

In your heart you have builded a mosque, and enshrined
There the living-dead love of Mark Landis, refined,

Sublimated, removed from all contact with earth,
Like the Mary of Grace, held as spotless of birth.
You imagine that you can preserve, in that shrine,
The once sacrificed love, now transfigured, divine,
And in secret to it silent homage pay, while
You encourage a grosser love springing, and smile,
And thus say to yourself: "Such a love must but die,
While immortal is mine."

XXII.

O, take heed how you ply
This most dangerous logic! For I do make bold
To declare that the love of this man taketh hold
On the things and the thoughts that are noblest. 'Tis true,
It is not, and it never can be, unto you,
An affection like that of Mark Landis; for rare
As appearance of spirits from realms of the air
Is the advent on earth of so spotless a love
As that one, seeming drawn from the great Heart above.
Yet within Richard Rolfe's manly breast there glows now
An affection a king might be proud to avow,
Or a queen might thirst after. Laugh not at this love,
Helen Graves, lest such laughter a Nemesis prove!

* * *

XXIII.

And what thoughts filled the brain of Mark Landis the while?
Murmured he:

"'Twere like seeking the source of the Nile,
To attempt the heart-bent of a woman to trace.
One will find, when he thinks he looks love in the face,
'Tis the face of a sphinx . . . Ah, how oft, in the days
That are dead, have I sat 'neath the lustreful gaze

Of those dark mirror-eyes, and believed that through mine
The clear soul that looked through them had made me the sign
Of the finding of home and of rest in my heart!
And this all was but seeming—this all was but art!

XXIV.

"And where then shall one seek in this wide world for truth?
Shall one seek it in age, when 'tis not found in youth?
Shall one seek it in man, when 'tis not found in woman?
Or seek it in brute breasts, when scarce found in human?
Come hither, my great bays, my pets, and my friends!
I will trust you, and love you, till life's story ends,
As end why should it not in the days that are near?
Your eyes gaze into mine, and no falsehood I fear.
While they rest on my face, I can fancy they see
An unselfish devotion clear-mirrored in me;
And I'm proud of your flattery, beauties in bay,
And in genuine coin your strong faith will repay."

XXV.

Thus the heart still rebelled against reason's behest,
And gave way to all shapes of abnormal unrest.
Vainly all self-command Mark had called to his aid;
"'Tis unmanly!" in vain had his better sense said.

XXVI.

My good reader, philosophize much as we may,
We'll find that, in the realm where the feelings hold sway,
A cry selfish for heart-compensation ascends,
E'en where sacrifice noble subserves lofty ends.
To that cry recognition appeasement can bring—
Recognition, though faint, of the heart's offering.
'Tis the one touch of self which the martyr makes kin
With the wretch who sells soul for the wages of sin.

This touch failing, how strangely, in clearest of minds,
Truth its crystal intent misinterpreted finds!
Recognition may work reconcilement where loss
Leaves of life's wine but lees, of its gold but the dross,
Though in time's farthest cycles it may never more
Aught repair, or renew, or recall, or restore.

XXVII.

Had this one simple factor to Mark been supplied,
With content had he borne, suffered, struggled, or died.
But it came not, and he, with injustice of thought,
Still his way blindly groped through the myths he had wrought.
Let us judge him in charity, mindful that One
Whom no myths mystified was once shut from the sun.



CANTO TENTH.

PASSION.

I.

Autumn days were no more. On bleak winds they had flown,
With the joys that once bosoms now aching had known.
But the stout Richard Rolfe with the autumn went not,
And his way toward Helen's heart bravely still fought.
Then the winter came on, with its sad, moaning blasts,
And its whispers of death, and its tyrannous frosts,
Holding nature's great heart in its dread icy chain,
And thus holding iced hearts of both women and men.
But frosts chilled not the heart that in Richard Rolfe's breast
Glowed with love's ever-heightening flames of unrest,
'Neath the calm, watchful gaze of the cold, soulless stars,
While rebelliously ever it beat 'gainst its bars,
With increasingly louder throbs, hasting the day
When love must have solution, the heart have its sway.

II.

That day came.
Of her bareness ashamed, earth, one morn,
Had determined her bosom to clothe and adorn
With a grand robe of ermine. It grew with the day;
And the great flakes came down, and successively lay
On her lean, shriveled breast, and thus rounded it o'er,
Till our dear, common mother was fair as of yore.

III.

'Twas the first snow of winter! Infectious, the joy
Spread to woman and girl, and to man and to boy;
And the beasts even caught the exhilarant flow
Of fresh spirit that set all existence aglow.
Then, hurrah! Cutters, sleighs, sleds, crates, jumpers, and pungs
Into quick requisition were brought; then wagged tongues,
And strove voices; bells jingled; and laughter rang out;
And now he was best fellow who loudest could shout,
Or who most noise could make, in the roar and the din
That this merry and jolly snow-storm ushered in.

IV.

Out, now, come the renowned grays of old Farmer Graves,
And the sleigh that for great state occasions he saves;
And out, too, come Mark Landis's steeds, with steps light,
With steps sure, with steps swift, o'er earth's carpet of white.
But no burden of mingled emotions the bays
Draw as erstwhile accustomed when long were the days.
And see! Now, with a flourish, Rolfe's chestnuts whirl through
Farmer Graves's wide gate, 'mid the whoop and halloo
Of the youngsters, and praise, all unstintedly paid,
Of the farm-hands, and worship of each dairy-maid.
Now, come forth, Helen Graves! For the little world here
Stands expectant to see Dick Rolfe's sweetheart appear.
In the whole country round thus by man and by maid
You are labeled by common consent; and 'tis said
A brave pair you will make; and no tone of dissent
From your lips has been heard to this voiced sentiment.
. . . She is here! She is fresh as the new-fallen snow;
And as gaily and heartily smiles she, as though

Never cloud had she known.

V.

Dick his passenger fair
In the sleigh seats; a word to the team, and the air
They are pawing.

VI.

The hour is the closing of day;
And, as swiftly the chestnuts in pride speed away,
Slowly rises the moon in her glory, in flood
Of white light bathing nature.
In tune and in mood
To enjoy to the uttermost this so enlivening scene,
Helen Graves, animated with zest sharp and keen,
As they glide through the snow, the embodiment seems
Of true, sentient delight. Her discourse with life teems;
For 'tis not the past, cold, cheerless, musty, and dead,
Nor the future, with films of day-dreams overspread,
Mainly burdens her converse just now: 'tis the present,
Its sharp, breathing facts, and its thought effervescent,
Its issues of pleasure and pain, of content and unrest,
And of right and wrong—life-issues, racking the breast
Of humanity, turning the struggling world
On their pivots, and blazoning banners unfurled
By armed hosts.

VII.

She is careful, however, to stray
Never too far beyond the frontier of to-day,
On debatable ground, whereon ultimate sources are traced
Of the wrongs to be righted or evils effaced;
For, although Richard Rolfe was e'er ready to fight,
With a stalwart, stout, unflinching arm, for the right,
As to him handed down, and by him understood,
Yet he deemed life too brief for his spirit to brood

O'er the chaos of causes and principles, trying
To solve problems the right and the wrong underlying,
Or to trace up too closely the process how he
In the right and his foe in the wrong came to be.

VIII.

He had listened intently while she had discoursed,
And had less of his own bright remarks interspersed
Than his wont was to do; for 'twas truthfully said
That Dick Rolfe had a dexterous tongue in his head,
One that on lubric hinges with nimble ease wagged,
And in speech on most topics afloat rarely lagged.
Yet the skill of his tongue now but little availed;
For, as often before, he had signally failed
To her obdurate heart any entrance to gain,
And a transcript of records there kept to obtain.

IX.

The gay sleighride thus ends; and, a victor once more,
Now exultant sing, Helen, your new triumph o'er.
You are free; you are mistress of self; the siege laid
Is not won; your heart-issue you still can evade!

X.

Bidding Helen good-night, Rolfe was lifting his reins,
When from old Farmer Graves came imperative strains:
"What, Dick! Going? I can't hear a moment to that!
You must stay here to supper, sir! That's squar and flat!
Hello! Moses! Job! Washington! Cæsar! Come here!
Sleighbells jingling as bravely as these can't you hear?
Would you let Master Dick's trotters freeze on their pins,
While by Aunt Dinah's fireplace you're toasting your shins?
Make haste, and them chestnuts take straight to the barn!
While, Dick, you to the parlor with Helen adjourn,

Whar the big maple logs in the great hearth are burning.
We've built a huge fire thar, against your returning.
And besides, Neighbor Dick, I don't reckon you know
That occasion I took of this first fall of snow
To bring down with my rifle a fat buck to-day,
And Aunt Dinah a haunch of it has under way."

XI.

There was still better reason Dick Rolfe could have given,
Why more strongly he had with the mandate not striven;
But he yielded in silence, and joined Helen where
Flushed she stood, with a halting, irresolute air,
And accompanied her to the fire-lighted room,
Which her presence for him all-sufficed to illume.

XII.

. . . With thoughts crowding, absorbed, erect standing, he gazed
Mutely into the hearth where the roaring logs blazed.
. . . "Pray be seated," said Helen; a strange, restive feeling,
A sense of half-guiltiness over her stealing;
For in Richard's demeanor one clearly might see
There were signs of a gathering heart-mutiny.
. . . "Thank you; I prefer standing," he said; and his eyes
Looked a look of such earnestness only as lies
In firm purpose, of heart-travail born.

XIII.

Then he broke
The oppressive, forced silence, and burning words spoke—
Words which longer evasion defied:
"Helen Graves,
Long enough at the sport of the winds and the waves,

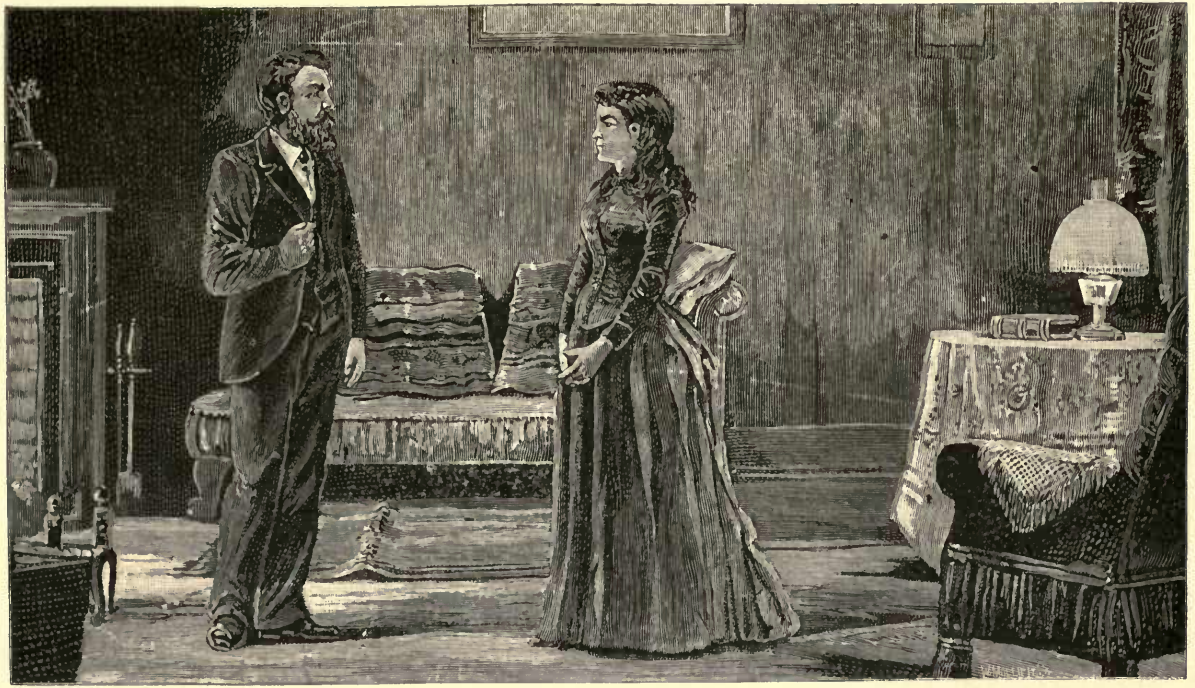
On the wild, raging ocean of love I've been tossed,
Passion-torn, with chart, compass, and rudder all lost.
. . . What need, Helen, to tell you I love you? You know
What my love is for you, as you know the warm glow
Of the fire in this hearth that now reddens your cheek
With reflection of flame. Shall I ask, shall I seek,
What reflection glows in your own heart from the fire,
The o'ermastering, sweeping, soul-reaching desire,
Which is burning my breast? . . . I have sought, I have asked,
I have questioned of you with my acts; I have tasked
All my strength of expression, to draw from your heart
One acknowledging word that to me should impart
What my soul longs to know, what my whole being craves—
What you shall me no longer deny, Helen Graves!"

XIV.

Then with suddenness burst o'er her passion's wild storm;
And, with arms strong and agile, he seized her lithe form,
And with gripe of a bear drew her close to his breast,
While his lips to her cheek and her forehead he pressed,
With a panther-like fierceness.
All struggling were vain:
As well struggle the reed with the wild hurricane;
As well struggle the toy-barque, but built for the hour,
With the roused ocean's savage and merciless power.

XV.

Like the hare in the coils of the python she lay,
Till the first shock of startled surprise passed away;
Then came slowly, while crimson grew brow, neck and cheek,
Words the tensive occasion impelled her to speak:



Looking full in the face the bold love-mutineer:
Looking full in his face, and yet not resting there.

"I appeal, Richard Rolfe, and I know not in vain,
To your honor, which never has suffered a stain,
To release me at once. You've assumed to be true
What exists not, though I may have given to you
Such encouragement as I should never have done;
For I cannot return the affection you've shown."

XVI.

She was conquered in spirit, and humbled in mien;
And the tones of her voice made it plain to be seen,
That she could not that proud indignation command
Which gives woman the firmness and strength to withstand
The advances temerity passioned may make,
And chains forged of adverse circumstances to break.

XVII.

"I release you," he said, "though I own to no wrong;
For, although you have found my embrace to be strong,
You shall find that the unrelaxed grasp of my love
Stronger still, and by far more resistless will prove."

XVIII.

The warm color was gone in her face that had glowed,
And a paleness succeeded it.
Silent she stood,
Looking full in the face the bold love-mutineer:
Looking full in his face, and yet not resting there;
Looking still beyond, into an eye that had dwelt
On her own with a great love, which having once felt,
Could her heart know an equal one ever again?
Thus, amid saddened tumult, of breast queried brain.
And her heart sighed:
"Ah me! If Mark Landis's arms
Had thus savagely seized me, my maiden alarms
Had been drowned in love's unstifled joy."

XIX.

All this passed
Through the doubt-perplexed, love-puzzled brain, heart, and breast
Of the pride-humbled Helen, while standing before
This roused rebel with whom she could parley no more.
. . . The long pause was becoming oppressive. Again
Richard spoke, but this time in a more subdued strain:

XX.

"In your smiles I could bask all the years, and let life,
With its turbulent tide, and its feverous strife,
Pass me by, and flow on, leaving me on the shore,
A poor idler, bereft of demonstrative power,
And bereft of the manhood that stands and asserts,
And deals hard blows and strong, and takes wounds and gives hurts.
But no idler must I ever be, and my place
I must once more resume in life's sharp, eager race.
. . . I had treasured the fancy that you loved me well:
I have been self-deceived through the fond, witching spell
You have over me cast. But my love is too strong
To yield now. I shall still love you patiently, long;
I shall love you with all a man's far-reaching love;
I shall love you with love which exhaustless will prove."

XXI.

Richard then gently took both her hands in his own,
And continued to speak in a tenderer tone:
"I now ask you no questions; await no replies;
But gaze into the depths of your kindness-filled eyes,
And they truthfully tell me, I think, my sweet friend,
That in still loving on I in no wise offend.

Yet I could but love on, were you angered or kind;
For no more can I tear you from heart than from mind."

XXII.

She was grateful to him that he questioned her not;
That he had not more closely her heart's reasons sought;
That he had in the tenderest kindness refrained
From unlocking the shrine that its treasures contained;
Left undrawn still the innermost veil, unrevealed
Still the ark in its holy of holies concealed.

XXIII.

She at last broke the silence:

"Large blame may be mine;
But, if sinning, I scarcely have sinned with design.
I am proud of the honor conferred by your love;
I am touched by its loyalty. All else above,
I discern, in this ardent affection of yours,
Not a mere fond caprice, but such love as endures
Through the clouds that care brings, such as faithfully wears
Through the rubbings and wrenchings that come with the years.
And if I could return it, and worthy I were
To possess and enjoy it, my soul it would spur
To exertions to sweeten and bless the large sphere
Of existence ennobled awaiting you here,
And your triumphs to crown with a love that should come,
To all laurels to add a contentment-filled home.
This I say, to show you that 'tis no idle thing
That I mean, no mere flattery-tribute I bring,
When I call your devotion an honor to me.
Yet the object of these your attentions to be

Becomes now but the source of the keenest of pain;
For I dare not encourage your fond hope to gain
My affections.''

XXIV.

''But, mark! It depends not upon
Aught by you thought or felt, aught by you said or done,''
He returned, in a kindly yet so firm a tone,
That she felt his strength gaining once more on her own;
''Though you spurn me, yet still shall I love you the same,
And your efforts to quench would but heighten the flame.
Yet let me once for all for your guidance now say,
That in what has transpired naught of fault can I lay
At your door; and to do so unmanly would be.
For a gentlemen who, with a fair field and free,
Fails of winning the heart of the woman he loves,
And then blames her, himself a poor gentleman proves.''

XXV.

. . . Tided over! A look of relief took the place
Of the one so perturbed which had passed o'er her face;
And the wonted lines back to her cheeks came again—
Again into her voice the full, resonant strain
That had oft made glad music in Richard Rolfe's soul;
And once more o'er herself Helen Graves had control.

CANTO ELEVENTH.

MELODY.

I.

Came the supper: A scene for the gods to gaze on!
. . . Farmer Graves lived in style of the days that are gone.
In his old Southern home he had bond-servants held,
In large numbers. The messuage with life they had filled;
And no meal had complete been esteemed in the house
Without something less than a full dozen black brows,
Old and young, great and small, hovering round the board,
And contributing all their diffusive parts toward
The occasion of state. And this custom, so dear,
To which, in all its cumbrousness, still to adhere,
Was the pride of John Graves, with its memories fraught,
With his household gods had from Kentucky been brought,
When he came North and founded his new prairie home;
And along with him, freed, his old servants had come.

II.

The great kitchen! Blest he who remembers its hearth
So gigantic, so vast, with back-log of huge girth,
And the loud-crackling fire; and hath seen, in the height
Of her glory, the cook, with a brow like the night,—
The old "Aunty", majestic, broad-shouldered and tall,
Stern, imperious, frowning, in awe held by all.

On this night she was there, in full bloom, in full power;
And whoever had dared, at this so solemn hour,
To infract her decrees, or her dignity scorn,
Or make light of her frown, had best never been born.

III.

With the vast mass of viands the table is piled.
There is venison, opossum-meat, fowl, tame and wild;
The materialized ghosts of great turkeys, like faith,
There transcendent in martyrdom, triumph o'er death;
And stuffed rabbits, that counterfeit life's native grace,
In roast pride laugh mortality's self in the face;
And mysterious dishes of rare, toothsome dainties,
Evolved from the fathomless depths of old Aunty's
Capacious and cavernous brain.

IV.

Full a score
At the farmer's o'erladen board sit, though no more
Than himself and the one lovely daughter belong
To his kith and kin of the domesticant throng.

V.

In the far, tender days of a season that came
Like the breath of the angels, and left but a name
And a pledge—the prized name to be evermore kept
As the most sacred relic in memory's crypt,
And the pledge to be nurtured and nourished in care,
And held free from the world's rough erosion and wear,—
There was anchored a love in those far tender days,
That linked old Farmer Graves to the past and its ways.
And when, looking across the broad table, he gazed
Fondly on his fair Helen, his pride, there was raised
From the depths of remembrance a Helen as fair,
And as sweet, with a beauty as bright and as rare,

As now dwelt in his sight. And he felt not the years
That had passed as the fleetest of dreams, while his ears
For the moment were deaf to the sounds of to-day;
And on memory's wings he had wandered away
To the pleasure-fraught scenes of a sunnier clime,
And the golden-winged hours of a happier time.

VI.

At the right hand of Helen sits Rolfe. Fair to see
Are the twain, and, in unrestrained comment and free,
Low-toned, favoring murmurs the table go round.

VII.

"They are made for each other."

"A match, I'll be bound!"

"That thar young Yankee farmer is sacked, I am told."
"Not a man in the country a candle can hold
To Dick Rolfe."

"Well, that ought, sure enough, to be so,
If he hopes with Miss Helen to stand any show."
"When are they to be married?"

"Can't tell; in the spring,
It's most likely; for Christmas, I'm thinking, would bring
It around altogether too soon for her, who,
Unlike most of our girls, is in no haste to go
From a home where she's so loved and prized."

VIII.

Thus the talk
Flowed in currents of frankness through this honest folk,
And 'twas clear that the drift of the sentiment there
Made Dick Rolfe and Miss Helen a surely matched pair.

IX.

And the dark "cloud of witnesses" standing around
(Whose opinions on such themes were strikingly sound)

Were a unit with old Uncle 'Bijah, who said,
As the chimney-jam buttressed his white, woolly head :
" Yaas : Mars' Dick an' Miss Hellun 'ud make a peert paar—
Mos' as peert as Mars' John and Miss Hellun dat war
Made in ole Kaintuck yender, in times long ago—
In de days, 'fyer heah me, dat doan' come roun' no mo' ! "

X.

Richard Rolfe was not sorry to see that all eyes
Toward Helen and him were directed sidewise ;
And he easily gathered, though hearing no word,
That they two formed the topic which ruled round the board;
Nor was old Farmer Graves either worried or vexed
To observe where the focal attention was fixed.
This last fact his loved daughter's sharp glance escaped not ;
For she long had suspected that if she had sought
To please him in the choice by her heart to be made,
His cup full would be filled should she " Neighbor Dick" wed.

XI.

How oft happens it, that, in life's drama, our parts,
Quite regardless as well of desires as deserts,
Are by others' hands for us arranged ! And, alas,
How oft also doth destiny bring it to pass,
That we yield our own wills to the casts thus designed,
And assume, without protest, our rôles as assigned !

XII.

. . . And what thought gentle Helen the while ? Did she dare
To give rein to reflection ? Did she harbor care
As to what this small world was now saying or thinking ?
It was plain that she was neither shirking nor shrinking ;
And one would have said, nothing hidden she feared ;
For more full of strong life had she never appeared :

Never had she exerted herself more to please ;
Never seemed with herself more completely at ease.

XIII.

. . . Supper over, the rich voice of Helen was heard
In such strains as Mark Landis's soul had oft stirred,
And which now, while with song the great parlor they filled,
Richard Rolfe's breast with still new and fresh delight thrilled.
They rang through all the house, and no heart but was cheered;
And the darkies, in native tones, plaintive and weird,
Took again the refrain, and gave back from their throng,
In melodious measure, the heart of the song ;
Which was one of loss, sweetened by trust ; a strange strain
Of commingled regret and content ; a refrain
Bearing in it a sorrow not hopeless ; a joy
Modulated ; a faith with scant earthly alloy.
'Twas I-have-and-have-not, and I-love-and-love-not,
Into melody turned, into sweet numbers wrought.

XIV.

But the words lent not mainly the life to the song :
Not in them lay such power the spell to prolong :
'Twas the voice that rang out in mellifluous waves,
And, transcending the limits of art's defined staves,
Made a track for itself over melody's sea,
And wrought out a new harmony, wild, fresh, and free.
Helen Graves, in her far Western home, had discerned
The new harmonic star in the East, and had learned
Of the prophet who had to old Europe revealed
What the music sublime of the future should yield;
And her soul had accepted, and uttered again,
The new gospel of melody given to men.
Thus, while half-improvised was the air that she sang,
In word-strains such as these the rich symphony rang :

Nature's Solaces.

1.

O, the robin sang gaily a song glad and rare,
And it floated far out on the fresh morning air.
My heart, torn with o'ershadowing grief,
Had in vain sought relief;
And I asked of the robin:
"Red robin, tell me,
What so joyous and free—
What it is that your song makes so joyous and free?"
Then the robin replied,
While no note of his died:
"I but joy to reveal that my song had its birth
In the heart of the world, in the sweet breast of earth:
For the world's heart is warm, and the earth's breast is true;
And, O, sad human soul, nature breathes but for you!"

2.

And a melody tender the nightingale fair
Sang, which thrilled with its music the evening air.
I was weary, and worn with unrest,
And my spirit unblessed;
And I said to the nightingale:
"Nightingale, tell
What with sweetness doth swell—
What it is that your notes with such sweetness doth swell."
And the nightingale said,
At the stars over head
Looking up: "From the soul of the beautiful night
Came my song—soul as pure as stars yonder are bright;
For I watched while the angels in Paradise dreamed,
And my song from the dreams they were dreaming I framed."

3.

O, the rose it bloomed freshly: rich scent did it bear,
And it burdened the breath of the soft summer air.
All my being some malady long
With deep anguish had wrung.
With the rose then I pleaded:
"Flush rose, tell the tale,
Such perfume to exhale—
What it is gives you power such perfume to exhale?"
Then the rose turned its head,
And with glowing face said:
"'Tis the world's better hope, 'tis the fullness of faith
In the things that shall be, gives me sweetness of breath;
For it lends my soul strength, and it yields my heart health,
And it fills all my life with affection's great wealth."

4.

And the violet bended with grace, O, so fair,
As it drew in the breath of the afternoon air.
Pride had darkened my days; I was bowed;
I sought rifts in the cloud.
I appealed to the violet:
"Violet, say,
With content all the day—
What it is with content fills you all the long day."
And the violet said:
"There is love overhead:
There is love all around me, though little I'm seen;
And I know I am loved; thus my heart is serene;
And I care not to bask in the sunshine's broad glare;
For love lives in the shade, and there's love everywhere."

. . . When, in blissful sensations rapt, homeward he drove,
Richard felt a new life his ambitious breast move.
He in Helen an undefined something had seen
Placing her far beyond his æsthetic demesne.
This invested her with a new charm in his eyes,
And renewed his resolve to secure the high prize.
. . . Once again, Helen Graves, now beware, O, beware!
Your besieger seems triumph to scent in the air.
The siege now will be stronger, the lines closer drawn;
Keep your ramparts well manned, your portcullis let down!





For I love your great heart, Mark, my king! If you live,
If you die, I am yours, I am yours, to the end.

CANTO TWELFTH.

LOVE.

I.

Helen went to her chamber, but not to find sleep.
Long she sat in a revery, reaching and deep.
Strong emotions, now bursting their chains, ruled her breast,
And refused to permit it in quiet to rest.
She arose, and, while facing the window, her gaze
Rested on the full moon, whose pure, affluent rays
Filled with glory the room, and transfigured her form,
As she stood in communion with thoughts which the storm
That had freshly swept o'er her had brought to her brain—
Thoughts that drew regret's phantoms along in their train.
In this mood she reviewed the thronged scenes of the day,
And soliloquized thus, in a woman's own way:

II.

"O, Mark Landis, I cannot absolve you from blame:
I reproach you for not having courage to claim,
As a brave claimant should, e'en in face of pale death,—
Yea, despite the dread warning of destiny's wraith,—
What were yours without cavil.

"If but for one day
To your breast you had held it, then flung it away!
To have lived but one hour closed as fast in your clasp
As I was in *his* manly and masterful grasp—

That were food to feed life; that were air to give breath;
That were light to guide hope; that were truth to light faith;
That were plenteous wealth for all time to supply
The vast treasure-house wherein love's memories lie!
And yet you to the winds with base recklessness flung
An affection that through death's dark shades would have clung.

III.

"In return for your weakness of heart, I should throw
My whole soul into this proffered new love, to show
My deep scorn of a craven! . . .
. . . "Mark Landis, my lord
And my master, my brave knight, forgive me that word!
Sovran prince of my soul, you are brave, you are true,
And among all the heroes I find none like you!
Unto you, unto you, my heart's worship I give;
For I love your great heart, Mark, my king!
"If you live,
If you die, I am yours, I am yours, to the end,
Be it near, be it far, O, my lover, my friend!

IV.

"—To the end, did I say?—to the end of true love?
Have God's æons an end? Have the star-realms above
A ceiled vault in the far empyrean defined?

V.

"No! As quenchless as faith, and as scathless as mind,
As eternal as truth, as confineless as space,
As unfading as hope, as unstinted as grace,
By the throne of Jehovah, when time's tale is told,
And earth's life but a dream, love its station shall hold.
It shall stand by the River of Water of Life,
Glorified by the wounds of the world's reddened strife.

There my soul shall meet thine, O, my lover, my friend:
There, where love hath no bounds: there, where love hath no
end!"

VI.

Again seated, she leaned her head back in her chair,
Overwearied with broodings so freighted with care.

VII.

Ah, Mark Landis! why could not one tone of this plaint
Reach your ear? Without selfish or temporal taint
Was this grand aspiration, this more than a prayer,—
Hope's triumphant cry rising from depths of despair;
Love's confession of faith, fervent, lofty, sublime,
Creed as broad as the world, as embracing as time!
At that hour, when all better impulses held sway
In this brave, struggling spirit, why could there not stray
Some kind angel from routine of duty above,
And come down to do one gracious service for love,
By but wafting a breath from this muffled, true heart
To the one, yonder, bleeding, in silence, apart?
. . . Why, ah, why! All uncounted the hearts in the track
Of dark fate that the myriadfold echo send back!

VIII.

. . . For a while from the flesh Helen's soul had been freed,
And by still waters roamed, in a Paradise-mead,
And amid shaded bowers, and in cool, fairy grots,
And where hope found fruition.
But ere long her thoughts,
In despite of her heart's protestations, were turned
To this man in whose bosom a love for her burned,
Whose red flames flashed defiantly in their fierce wrath—
This reality dread, standing straight in her path.

IX.

And she asked of herself:

"Must I learn to love him?
Must I meet and embrace this fatality grim?
And what sort of a love were it thus that I gave?
It were fruit of a tree whose roots spring in a grave!
And him *could* I love ever? O, heart, ask me not!
Leave me free from the questions with soul-torture fraught!
What I do, or do not, let the future decide:
For this hour let me rest—let me float with the tide.
On its bosom while onward my barque shall be borne,
Near or far if the rapids be, let me not learn,
If I yearn, if I struggle, 'tis vain; yet—and yet—"

X.

Again swept o'er her being a wave of regret,
And upon it her spirit, with love's tumult worn,
To the restful dominions of Dreamland was borne;
For her senses, o'erwearied, resigned their control,
And she dreamed such a dream as brought peace to her soul.

XI.

Blessed, now and forever, be Dreamland the fair!
If with life's battle faint, we find truce sounded there;
If care's cloud has grown black, there light gleams through the rifts;
If grief weighs down the heart, there some sprite the soul lifts.

* * * *

XII.

Blithely passed the gay season with Rolfe, and it seemed
That this bright world with only delight for him teemed;
While the days all too quickly flew over his head,
And scarce reached seemed its midst, when, lo! winter was dead.

XIII.

And how prospered the siege?
Helen's heart still held out,
Though one outwork was captured—the Pity redoubt.
Sympathy for the man who was wasting on her
The devotion paid idol by blind worshiper,
And desire to please him who on her had bestowed
Her life, blossoming ever with bliss, until showed,
Its horizon above, love's dread planet, and brought
To her heart the fierce storm which such ravage had wrought,
Well nigh made her at times pray to Heaven to turn
Her so obdurate heart, and to aid it to learn
To love him whom fate thus seemed to place in her way.
. . . Yet the spring found her heart, where in autumn it lay,
At the feet of Mark Landis. Though pitying Rolfe,
There was still between her love and him a wide gulf.

XIV.

And that never was winter so weary, was what,
By his hearth sitting lonely, Mark Landis had thought—
Sitting lonely there, or, with his sociable beasts,
Keeping company while they partook of their feasts.

XV.

Thus these variant phases did winter assume
To three hearts passing on through its sunshine and gloom,—
Passing on to the bourne of all seasons and years,
To quietus of heart-beats, heart-pangs, and heart-cares.

PART SECOND

TRIAL

CANTO FIRST.

WAR.

I.

There was war in the land.
Passions stronger than death,
Deep as hell, and as burning as Ætna's fierce breath,
Bursting forth, rent the heart of the nation in twain.

II.

For the chronicler-bard it were fruitless and vain,
To seek causes and sources to trace of the strife,
Which, thus waged in mad hate o'er the nation's warm life,
While it gave to her bondmen the boon to be free,
Left such memories rankling in years yet to be,
As to cloud all the good that may from it have flown,
Leaving war still a curse unapproached and alone
In demoniac balefulness, earth's supreme bane,
And our civilization's Plutonian stain.
Let the truthful, impartial historian frame
An indictment to fasten the burden of blame;
For opinions formed in the war-smoke of to-day,
Be they those of sage, statesman, or bard, must give way
To the judgments of riper and wiser to-morrow;
And poets in no wise can trench on or borrow
From history's oracles.

III.

War ruled the land:
Its wild spirit was master on every hand.
It pervaded the pulpit; through courts and schools swept;
It invaded the precincts of home, and guard kept
Over men's tongues and women's, to see that none wavered—
That naught should be uttered of peace-thoughts that savored.

IV.

O, thou Lord God of Sabaoth! Hasten the day,
When men, brothers, no longer in war's red array
Shall do battle and murder in any named cause,
Be it for freedom's semblances, mutable laws,
Constitutions ambiguous, rights sprung from wrong,
Or gray crime-grants, embalmed in fair story and song;
For weak governments, guided by freaks of the hour.
Or for kinglets who reach for imperial power;
Or to serve feuds begotten in statesmen's intrigues,
Or their mistresses' whims, or dark cabals or leagues,
In a morbid philanthrophy's frenzied designs,
Or in conflicts of creeds, or disputes of divines;
Or for any right, interest, faith, or pretext,
Based on claims in this world, or on hopes in the next,
Sprung to light fires of hell in the earth's peaceful vales,
And with cries of the furies freight freshening gales!

V.

. . . Richard Rolfe was a patriot. Love of the land
That had given him birth, with its area grand,
With its masterful millions of monarchs uncrowned,
With its true recognition of labor unbound,
With its wealth, and its strength, and its greatness, was strong
In his breast, and he asked not her right nor her wrong,

When a loud call to arms by his country was made,
Which he no sooner heard than he promptly obeyed.
He affected no fine metaphysics, and therefore
Stopped not, searching after the why and the wherefore
Of this mighty quarrel, but reasoned in that,
As in all issues coming before him, from what
To his mind appeared patent, and (frown not, my muse,
While I here the expressive vernacular use)
Reasoned "straight from the shoulder", as patriots should:
Thus, without any if or and, ready had stood,
And at once, dropping schemes, dropping love, dropping all
Life held dear, had marched forth at the nation's sharp call.

* * * *

VI.

Behold yonder fair landscape! The calm smile of God
Seems to rest on it, brighten it, hallow its sod.
Watch the stream o'er its pebbles run rippling along;
Hear it purl like the rythmical spirit of song;
Observe yon still retreats, whither lovers might steal,
Their hearts' secrets to nature's close ear to reveal;
Mark the breeze o'er the fields of the golden grain sweep,
Standing ready for reapers who come not to reap;
See the farm-house that stands in the maple-trees' shade—
But, say, where are the tenants?—asleep, or all fled?
See in pasture and upland the cattle and sheep
Calmly grazing—how sagely the secret they keep
If a secret this landscape there be hanging o'er;
But the bees in the meads are a gossiping corps;
And the birds in the apple-trees carol so gay,
That all nature seems taking a glad holiday.

VII.

But again look, and closer, o'er this quiet scene.
Do ye see, lying hid in those thickets of green,
Lying buried 'neath waves of the golden-eared grain,
Crouching, sheltered by stable, by shed, rick, and wain,
Creeping under the banks of the murmuring stream,
On whose surface the sunbeams dance, sparkle, and gleam,
And hid close 'neath the roses whose breath freights the air,
Human forms, watching, waiting, like Nemeses there?

VIII.

Are these savages, lurking to seize on their prey?
Not at all! They are soldiers, awaiting the fray.
They are civilized foemen, in war's earnest vein;
They are men on the picket-line, watching for men,—
Watching sharply for forms like their own to come forth;
For the forms of men, kindred in race and in birth;
Watching closely for chances to slay them at sight,—
Yea, to slay them with calmness, in glare of the light
Of this radiant, glad, early summer mid-day,
In the face of God's love, and his "Thou shalt not slay!"

IX.

And, mark! Yonder, where meadow-lands skirt the dense grove,
Now appear here and there, and as stealthly move,
Other forms, other men, other uniformed foes,
Likewise waiting, and watching, and lurking for those
Who are brethren in interest, brethren in blood,
Eager with them to plunge into slaughter's red flood.

X.

One thin, white puff of smoke now with suddenness leaps
From a clump of trees round which the rivulet sweeps;

And a sharp, stinging sound the day's charmed stillness breaks,
And the first echoes of the approaching fight wakes.
Then in rapid succession comes shot after shot.
Picket-firing has opened! The skirmish is hot;
And along the bright stream now the roused foemen press,
While at each rush their numbers grow fearfully less,
As they one by one fall in the silvery flood,
And the waters pellucid grow dark with their blood.

XI.

. . . But that's barely a brush—merely skirmishers' play:
They have hardly yet opened the glorious day!

XII.

On the farther confines of the picket-line, hark,
Where across the wide fields the long-range rifles bark.
They have there a rare sharpshooters' match! One detects
How each marksman his doomed human target selects.

XIII.

"Yonder stands a proud youth, in his confident strength:
It is far, but my rifle will carry that length.
. . . Ha! I brought him! My lad, they will wait for you long,
In your loved, distant home, when the evening song
With hushed voices is sung; and—oh, God! *I* am hit!
'Twas a home shot! . . . Boys, leave me reclining a bit;
Please, a drink! Jim, this keepsake to poor Mary send.
. . . What. Are you also struck? Well, old comrade and friend,
Then together we'll die; and some one may yet tell
At our homes, how here in the front, fighting, we fell."

XIV.

"Jack, d'you note that white beard? It's a good mark for me:
I am going to draw a dead bead on it . . . See!

It is not quite as white as it was! Hit the throat!
'Tis an officer: tell by the braid on his coat.
This will gain me a chevron, I hope; and I'll soon,
If I score a few more such fine shots as this one,
Sport a shoulder-strap."

XV.

Thus goes the skirmishing on,
While still hotter and hotter the firing has grown;
And they fall, not by ones, but by tens, and by scores.
Now the flying artillery belches and roars;
They are shelling the woods, and, ah! these are on fire,
Of the wounded and dead alike making a pyre!

XVI.

The two armies, at length, in unmasked strength come forth,—
Cannon, cavalry, infantry, shaking the earth;
The great guns blazing fire with hoarse hell in their breath,
And the fierce dragoons trampling and sabring to death.
By the hundreds, the thousands, the brave foemen fall!
God of mercy! A truce to the mad carnage call!

XVII.

. . . At last, pitying night, with its sad, kindly face,
With its friendly enwrapment, to wild day gives place,
And the combatants, weary with slaughter, retire,
To renew on the morrow the havoc of fire.

XVIII.

O, bright landscape that lay in the morning so fair,
Where are now your glad beauties, which laughed in the air?
Where is now the ripe grain that in golden pride stood?
Darkly runs yonder stream with clear current that flowed!
O, sweet rose-tree, 'neath which a brave form was espied,
Redder than your red roses your leaves now are dyed;

And where breathed in the morning the balm of your breath,
There now rises a dank, sickly odor of death!
O, ye apple-trees, then thick with bright blossoming,
Small the fruitage that with autumn's gold you will bring!
O, ye birds that made vocal those apple-tree boughs,
As glad songs as this morn's the next sun will not rouse!

XIX.

The black demon of war now his tenure doth yield,
For the angel of mercy hath charge of the field,
And her servitors gather the wounded and dead,
While repairing the waste which that demon hath made.

XX.

. . . "Who is this that so slowly and sadly you bear?"
"'Tis an officer, for better dress does he wear
Than the foe's rank and file: that, however, is all
We can tell. He was hit with a large musket-ball
In the breast, very close to the lungs. Not a word,
Since we took his form up, from his lips has been heard,
Except one."
"And that?"
"Helen."
"Bah! How will this aid
To identify him? We have loverless made
Many hundreds of Helens by work this day done.
Dress his wound. Report: 'Prisoner, wounded, unknown.'"

CANTO SECOND.

RESOLVE.

I.

On the prairies are summer's full glories displayed,
And the groves in their deepest of green are arrayed.

II.

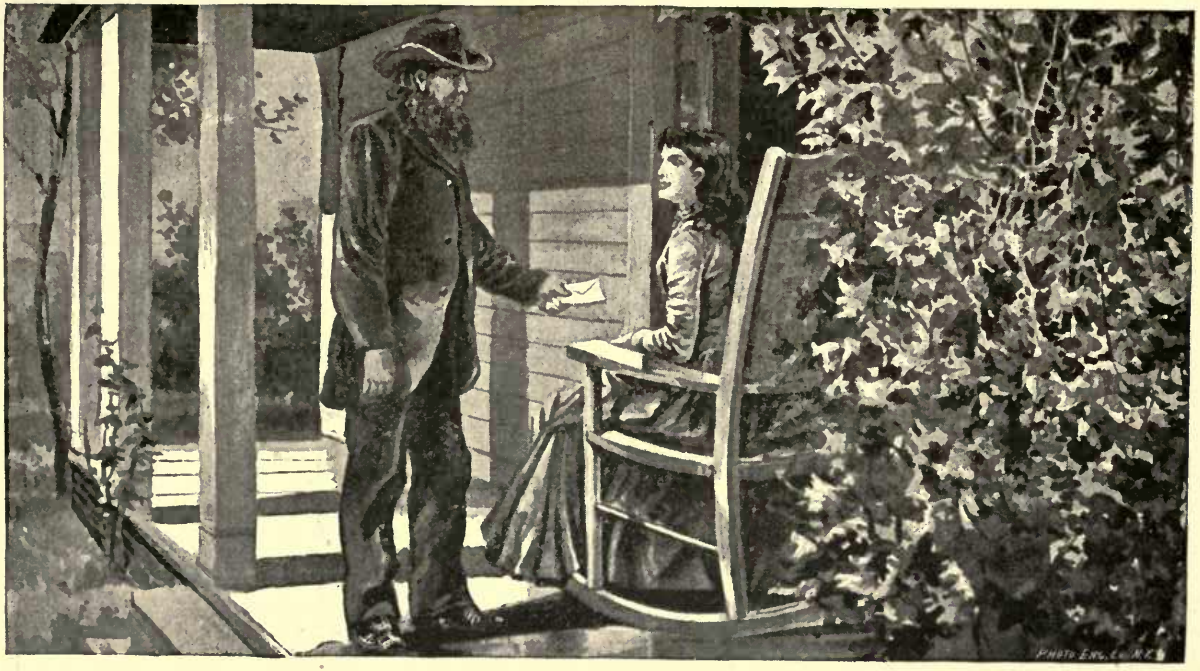
Helen Graves on the spacious veranda is sitting,
While the moments on idle wings past her are flitting—
The veranda, low, Southern-styled, old fashioned, quaint,
But as dear to her heart as the shrine of a saint;
Round her climbing the vines, in rich, clustering grace,
Through whose veil the warm sunshine steals over her face.
She has sat there and dreamed in the motherless years
Of her childhood, when dreams were oft melted in tears—
Tears not such as of waters of Marah partake,
But like unto the dew left when April mists break.

III.

. . . Since the day Richard Rolfe, at his regiment's head,
Marching off to the war, "Good bye!" gently had said,
With love's own look of fondness, herself she had sought
In the court of her conscience to try. She had brought
'Gainst herself all the charges that could be devised
By accusing remorse.

IV.

The indictment comprised
Many counts.



She heard
From her dear parent's lips that he held in his hand
For his darling a missive.

This the first one: that with subtle art,
She had blinded, beguiled, and betrayed her own heart;
Next, that she to Mark Landis, in wrongfulest scorn,
Had denied her heart's child, which was honestly born;
Then, that false and deceptive herself she had shown
To the true heart from brave Richard Rolfe she had won;
And, again, to her own soul unfaithful had proved,
And untrue to its high aspirations; unmoved
Sat while with their grand issues the starred days went by,
And no part sought to take, and no venture to try;
Had sat cowering, shrinking, 'mid ghosts of regret,
Without courage to hope, or the will to forget;
With no strong trust to cling to, no great end to gain;
With no plenary love the heart's strength to sustain,
While beneath the soul's care it should grow in love's grace,
But to gather its fruitage as seasons increase.

V.

On behalf of Self, then, Pity put in the plea,
That the strong arm of fate had not left her hands free;
And that not on Self wholly the fault-burden lay;
That love had been by circumstance robbed of its sway.

VI.

To this plea, the heart, joining the issue, demurred,
And made earnest and fervent demand to be heard
On its own behalf, claiming that love hath no law;
That the heart of no task-master standeth in awe,
Save love's self; and that love that is true love doth stand
Over fate, as the firmament over the land.

VII.

Then stern Conscience, the judge, judgment gave on this wise:
That Self had been most blameful; that through sacrifice

Only e'er can the spirit gain peace, and be blest;
That as Self had not sacrificed, Self had no rest.

VIII.

Then did Self murmur at the decree, and complain:
"Did I not, in the travail of woe and of pain,
Sacrifice my one treasure—plunge into my breast
With my own hand the knife where the idol lay pressed?"

IX.

"Nay, not so," answered Conscience, the judge; "name not aught
That with spirit of vengence is thought or is wrought,
As intent or as deed sacrificial. Vainly made
Is the offering, save on the true altar laid."

X.

Then was dumb the condemned, guilty Self;
And it only thought this:
"For the paltriest pelf,
For poor pottage and leeks, for the lees of the hour,
I have sold, I have bartered, the heart's gentle power!
But to gratify spleen, but to humor caprice,
I have breached, I have blasted the heart's sacred peace!"

XI.

Inquisition the sternest the culprit now made
On her treatment of Rolfe, and her conduct thus weighed:
"And where, then, do I stand, in the light of the love
Of this great heart, this proved heart, my own far above,
Of this stout heart that bravely went forth, that may now,
While I here idly pine, in death's stillness lie low,—
Where do I, in that light, beaming honestly, stand?

XII.

"Shade of Madam Marsile! My brow wears the dark brand

Of a falsehood embodied, as deep as the soul,
As offensive and rank as a breath from Sheol.
Him I never have loved; yet I never have dared,
Coward base that I am, let my bosom be bared,
And its secrets be shown. Did I need be ashamed
That these secrets so cherished be known and be named?
God of Heaven, forgive me! My sin is too great:
I bend low with the burden—I break 'neath its weight!"

XIII.

With her face in her hands buried, and her dark hair
Flowing loosely and mantling her form, she sat there,
And longed only for tears—for such tears as had flown
In the bright, sunny days that her childhood had known.

XIV.

. . . Up and down this large world I have roamed, far and wide,
And full many a woman have met in her pride,
And full many a one in her humbleness seen,
And some myriads more in the golden between;
But, as far as I've wandered, I've never met one,
In whatever clime under the sweet-smiling sun,
In the sleepy old lands that are washed by the Rhine,
Or the wide-awake realms Mississippi's banks line,
Where the Mediterranean's blue billows leap,
Or where over the Pampas the Andes gales sweep,
Old or young, grave or gay, brune or blonde, plain or fair,
Or as ugly as sin, or with loveliness rare,
I have never met female who did not feel better,
Whatsoe'er her condition, when handed a letter.

XV.

Helen Graves was to this no exception. She stirred
With a feeling of joyous surprise, when she heard

From her dear parent's lips, that he held in his hand
For his darling a missive.
From Revery-land
She came back, and looked up through her curls; and there stood,
Gazing down upon her in the tenderest mood,
The benign, loving-kindness filled, worshiping form,
That, a vigilant warder, in sunshine and storm,
Had been guarding, adoring her, all the years through;
Though of ward, ah, how little the fond warder knew!

XVI.

THE LETTER.

DEAREST COUSIN:

Although not inclined to forget
That in our correspondence you stand in my debt;
Yet I disregard scruples in now writing you,
And in sending you this, as I must send it, through
The close-drawn lines of war, and unsealed, which, you know,
To a woman who has no vain itching for show,
Is intensely annoying, especially when
One has something to say that one wants not rude men
To peer over, which now just the case is with me.
. . . Pray, when were you engaged, Cousin? Or, can it be
That you're married?—And this, by the way, brings me straight
To my point, for which, doubtless, you anxiously wait.
After one of the battles they've recently fought,
A supposed dying officer, captive, was brought
To the outpost at which brother Harry commands,
And, too feeble to move, was left there in his hands;
And this prisoner's lips have been since closely sealed
In unconsciousness, just as when borne from the field,

Save when fitfully breathing one name with low moan,
And that name, strange to say, my dear Cousin, your own.
But still stranger: a locket was found in his breast,
Which was covered with blood, and all battered, and pressed
Fairly into the flesh, but thus breaking the force
Of the ball, and deflecting its death-seeking course.
And the locket, thus shielding his bosom in part,
Kept the bullet from bedding itself in his heart;
Though it ploughed through his breast, tearing like a hacked
knife,
And the mangled frame left but a shadow of life.
And the closing fact for me remains now to tell,
That the locket contained your own likeness, dear Nell!
—Thus writes Harry, who wants me to ask you to give
This poor officer's name, and his rank. Should he live,
Harry says, for your sake, he will do what he may
To procure his exchange.
. . . Cousin Nell, do you pray
That this carnage may cease? Let us plead
Daily that mercy's angel may soon intercede,
Brothers' daggers from bosoms of brothers to keep.
It is all we poor women can do, save to weep,
And to bind up the wounds that are made day by day,
While the spirit of hate hourly widens its sway.
. . . You are wrong, you know, Nell, in this war; but I bear
Toward you no ill-will, as your home is up *there*;
Though all kin I've foresworn, to the end of my days,
Who down *here* for your cause voice or arm e'er shall raise.
. . . And ties not those of blood I have severed for aye.
You remember the lover I had? He's away
In the enemy's ranks.

Thus heart-troubles in waves
Flood the breast of
Your ever dear Cousin,
MAUD GRAVES.

XVII.

What is grander, sublimer, in nature or thought,
Than the birth of a noble resolve? Tell me not
Of a Venus arising from depths of the sea;
Tell me not of a sunburst illuming a lea;
Tell me not of Aurora from billows of dawn
Springing up, by her coursers aërial drawn;
Tell me not of a rose bursting forth in its bloom.
When the soul bringeth forth from its faith-pregnant womb
A great purpose of good, to be baptized of hope,
And full-armed to proceed with earth's powers to cope,
Or to sacrifice, suffer, or silently bear,
There's but one thing in time with which it can compare:
'Tis the scene in the manger, where burned the bright star,—
'Tis Immanuel's one glorified avatar.

XVIII.

From perusing the letter, arose Helen Graves,
With a soul such as frownings of destiny braves;
With a heart such as circumstance-barriers leaps;
With a breast such as counsel with energy keeps.
No more yieldings to siren suggestions of ease;
No more base, cringing compromise-making for peace;
No more crouching 'neath shadows of doubt or of fear.
Stand back, tempters! A live, earnest woman is here!
Shrink back, demons of darkness, and skulk to your caves!
You are no longer masters where breathes Helen Graves!
She is queen of herself. She, in grace and in power,
Proudly steps forth and rules, is not ruled by the hour!

XIX.

. . . Farmer Graves, sitting under the shade of his trees,
Was enjoying his pipe and his afternoon's ease.
Helen came and sat down on his knee, and caressed,
Petted, fondled him, stroked his gray beard, and then pressed
His great hands in her small ones, and toyed with his fists,
And at length tied together with ribbons his wrists.
"Now," she said, "you're my prisoner. I must take you
Far away with me, as they with war-captives do;
And I'll hold you in bonds till you heed my behest."

XX.

"Yes, my girl," he replied, in half earnest, half jest;
"You shall take me wharever you please. I will go
Far and long—round the world, if you choose. Let me know
Whar and when you would travel. I'm yours to command."

XXI.

"If you only were serious;" and her soft hand
She then laid on his shoulder, and into his eyes
So intently she gazed, that a silent surprise
Overspread his mild face, and he said:
"What, my child!
Do you doubt me? Have I once with promise beguiled
That thar trusting and all-loving heart? Nary word
From these lips, now or ever, my girl, have you heard,
But the truth. I for you am all truth. Though I lied
Like the veriest thief to the whole world beside,
To my darling I would not, could not lie and live.
She has all of my confidence. Now, will she give
To her father and friend some small part of her own?"

XXII.

Helen shrank at his searching glance, while he went on:

"Tell me what is the longing that gives you unrest;
Tell me what I can do to give joy to your breast.
Would you wander in Old World lands? This you shall do:
I have time; I have means; and they're all, girl, for you."

XXIII.

Then she kissed him as sweetly as lover could kiss;
And she said:

"O, my father, not this, no, not this,
Though to me as the honey of Hybla 'twere dear,
And would realize longings of many a year;—
Not for this shall I ask; not there now would I roam,
But in lands in the New World; in lands nearer home,
Although farther in spirit removed from us now,
Than those where savage races to savage gods bow."
Here she drew from her bosom the letter from Maud,
And a blush tinged her cheek while she read it aloud.

XXIV.

"Dick alive? God be thanked! I'd clean given him up!"
Exclaimed old Farmer Graves.

XXV.

Then said Helen:

"The hope
Is a faint one that he may survive: That hope faint
Is one I could make stronger, if thither I went."

XXVI.

The least shade of a frown flitted quickly athwart
His rough face; but enough to strike chill to her heart.
"Is it right, Helen, love, is it squar', that the child
Of John Graves should a thing do so wild?
You are not his affianced, you are not his bride.
What excuse could you give to the world thus defied?"

XXVII.

The reply that was given was one that alone
Could from woman's breast come, when, assumptive, its own
Boldly womanhood claims, and assertingly stands,
While demanding great work for its e'er ready hands.

XXVIII.

"I should go, fearing not to incur the world's scorn;
I should go in the right whereunto I was born;
I should go as a woman, her mission to do;
I should go as a Christian, to try to prove true
To the memories clinging round Calvary's tree;
I should go as a friend, which I glory to be;
But, in prouder capacity still, I should go
As the daughter of honest John Graves, whom to know
Is to know that a daughter of his could not do
Anything to be justly brought under review.
Where I went should my father go: who, then, would dare
Call in question my right to appear anywhere?
No times, seasons, nor places, calls mercy her own,
And shut out is her ministrant spirit from none."

XXIX.

There had mounted, meanwhile, all the heightened Graves blood
To her cheek and her forehead, in one crimson flood;
And John Graves, looking on it, was proud of his child,
And no longer saw aught in her plan that was wild.

XXX.

"Well, well, darling; I yield. Your own way you shall have,
And I'll help you to rescue poor Dick from the grave."
She embraced him, her gratitude warmly to prove,
And he thought: "How profound for Dick Rolfe is her love!"

XXXI.

Thus we go through the world, one and all, self-deceived,
Or deceived by friends nearest; impressions received
In the heart's chosen moments at times telling lies,
On which feed misconceptions, whence grievings arise,
And the bitterness bringing estrangements of heart,
And the friendships of golden years rending apart.
And all this while intent is the purest and best,
Springing where love's own benison blesses the breast.

XXXII.

O, strange riddle of life! who that riddle hath read?
Wondrous maze of the heart! who that maze shall e'er thread?
Purblind weaklings, how hug we the vain, fond pretense,
That we one with another exchange confidence!—
That we throw open e'er, for one hour in time's tide,
All the soul's window-blinds, to swing freely and wide!
No! on never a morning of gladness or joy,
Be the breath that mild zephyrs breathe never so coy,
Play the sunlight around us in beams ne'er so bright,
Does the soul, when admitting the air and the light,
Let the eyes of heart-favorites, true, near, or dear,
Through *all* windows and into *all* recesses peer.



CANTO THIRD.

SACRIFICE.

I.

There were Graveses in both armies, fighting for rights
As illusive as gleams of the Great Northern Lights;
There were Graveses in gray; there were Graveses in blue;
There were Graveses uncertain which color was true,
Toward either maintaining an armed attitude
Of neutrality. So that John Graves found his blood
Flowing on either side, and "betwixt and between,"
Very much to his moral perplexing, I ween.
Yet a patriot no less was he. Though his line
Civil war rent asunder, and feelings malign
Made of kindred sworn foes, still the great heart he bore
In his breast was unswerved and unblinded, and true to the core
To the nation as one, to the flag, clean and free,
To the race, as inheriting one destiny.

II.

The close, warped definitions of patriot faith,
Springing out of war's fetid and feverous breath,
Are akin to those born in the schisms of creed,
On which theologues fatten, in truth's sorest need.
Blatant demagogues ever on shibboleths thrive,
And as oft to the heart of true loyalty drive
The sharp steel of proscription, as into the heart
Of rank treason. And since it is out of the smart

Thus produced—out of rancors and hurts festering—
That their profit, and vantage, and glory they wring,
'Tis small matter to them how results, that are fraught
With such gainfulness to them, are compassed or wrought.

III.

And in like way divinity dogmatists stand,
With the red-heated orthodox irons, and brand
With the heretic stigma, promiscuously,
All who fail truth through their narrow lenses to see.
The fact that on the smell of the burning flesh grows
The unsavory bigotry-tree, on whose boughs
Hangs the fruit which they feed on, suffices for them;
And they reck not how loyal the souls they condemn
May to God and to right and humanity be,
If the eyes of the world shall their brands plainly see.

IV.

. . . Strange and sad seemed it to Farmer Graves, as his way
From the ranks of the Blue to the ranks of the Gray
With his daughter he made—from the old Stripes and Stars,
All within the same land, to the new Stars and Bars;
With white flag to be passing from camps of his kin,
Through scenes which by his childhood's years hallowed had been,
To camps where other kindred, in hostile array,
But awaited the signal to ravage and slay.
. . . Yet, O, student of history! these are the signs
Of a war internecine, and these the red lines
Such a war through a land of enlightenment draws,
Whatsoe'er be its aims, whatsoe'er be its cause.

* * * *



Bending down o'er the cot, she breathed low but one word—
"Richard!"

V.

In a hospital-tent, in a peaceful spot placed,
With the choicest of nature's embellishments graced,
Where the rays of the sun, through oak boughs stealing down,
Were upon a serene scene of suffering thrown,
Beneath rough-handed, kind-hearted soldier-care lay
Richard Rolfe, with a slow fever wasting away.
Slumber visited seldom his worn, shrunken frame,
And brought little refreshment whenever it came ;
While with void, leaden eyes, gazing e'er into space,
At a something they seemed never able to trace,
He watched, waited, in mood uncomplaining and mild,
And submissive and meek as a suppliant child,
As if fearing impatience would frighten away
The fond object his spirit still beckoned to stay.
. . . In the hush of the sunset hour, gliding as soft
As winged messengers bearing a freed soul aloft,
And as gently as dew falls when rose-leaves it laves,
To that tent came the presence of fair Helen Graves.

VI.

Bending down o'er the cot, she breathed low but one word—
"Richard!"—word the weak sufferer's muffled ear heard ;
And the tympanum magic of sense took the tone,
And through long silent mind-chambers sounded it on,
To the throne isolated where sat the sad soul,
Which gave heed, and sent into the eyes dim and dull,
With their look cold and death-like, so gladsome a glance,
That it lighted with cheer the entire countenance.
Though the gleam was but transient, with flickering light
Half illuming the mind in delirium's night,

Yet the angel of hope whispered soft of the dawn,
Whose gray lines on the spirit's horizon were drawn.

VII.

"It is Helen, I think," spoke the low, feeble voice;
"But I know not as yet, and I dare not rejoice;
For it may be a vision. If such it should prove,
I should die of the pain of regret.
"Do not move;
Do not leave me, I pray. Let me sleep, and get strength.
I am weary."
With sweet, restful slumber, at length,
His exhausted and death-shadowed spirit was blessed,
While she watched, like a guardian angel, his rest.

VIII.

. . . From Hygeia's realm must some deft fairy have crept
To his cot, and poured balm o'er his soul while he slept,
And peace unto the fevered mind-mutiny spoke;
For when once more the fetters of slumber he broke,
Reason, like an estranged friend, returned; and eyes glazed
And lack-lustre no more into vacancy gazed.
Slowly came to the cheeks something of the old hue;
And hope's signals, which had been appearing in view,
Told the tale of life crossing in safety the gulf
That had yawned between earth and the brave Richard Rolfe.

* * * *

IX.

Lying one afternoon on his cot, by whose side
At her post Helen sat, and her needlework plied,
Making bandages for other wounded, (her soul
Having been in sweet mercy's ranks moved to enroll

For the war,) Richard, still from the fever's rage weak,
Turned to Helen and said :

X.

" Pardon me if I speak
Of a matter that weighs on my conscience. To you,
My dear friend, I would make a confession, and sue
For your pardon.

" Before our brigade marched away,
From your album your photograph taking, one day,
In mere playfulness, while your attention was turned,
A brief while I retained it, and ere 'twas returned,
A thought wrongful suggested itself to my mind ;
And, as conscience to yield to heart e'er is inclined,
I did with the dear treasure, all unknown to you;
What love's urgency only could tempt me to do.

XI.

" I had wished for your likeness, but yet had refrained
From requesting its gift, lest you might be constrained
To refuse, leaving me a memento of pain
To bear with me while longings unstilled should remain.
I believed that in camp 'twould a talisman be,
And I caused to be painted upon ivory
A fair duplicate. Here it is, bruised, but still true.
Talisman has it proved. I restore it to you.
I have no right to keep it. To me though 'tis dear—
God knows how dear !—I dare not withhold it, for fear,
If I failed restitution to make, that its charm
It would lose, as an amulet shielding from harm."

XII.

Helen gazed at the miniature fixedly ;
And she said :

" 'Tis a flattering likeness of me ;

And somewhat on his fancy the artist has drawn.
Pray, by whom, Richard, was it so charmingly done?"

XIII.

"A revered common friend of ours, Helen, wrought this:
One not given at all to such false flatteries.
'Twas Mark Landis who painted this portrait so well;
And you know that Mark Landis truth only can tell,
Whether speaking with tongue, or with brush, or with pen,
And false colors wears not nor employs among men."

XIV.

She suppressed the emotion her breast that disturbed;
For emotions still stronger than this she had curbed.
Ah! our Helen was learning the world's code by heart,
And in life's profound drama perfecting her part!

XV.

Control having once more of herself, Helen said,
While again on his breast the bruised locket she laid:
"That you had this fine copy thus made, I am glad;
I'm rejoiced that when wounded the locket you had.
I forgive you with all my heart. Here: take again
This by your loyal faith so o'erprized talisman,
And continue to wear it for me."

XVI.

In her words
There was that which awoke all the resonant chords
Of his heart, and attuned them to music most sweet;
And the joy that he felt gave him boldness to greet
What he hoped the sure harbinger now of that love
He had looked for, and longed for, and yearned for, would prove.
"Helen, tell me: can I not discern in your breast
The first dawning of love for me? O, to be blessed

With your heart's strong affection throughout this grand
strife,
To my arm will give strength, to my soul will yield life."

XVII.

"Richard Rolfe," she replied, with a voice that was calm
As the tone of a convent-nun chaunting a psalm,
"I am trying to love you. Your love is so strong,
And so deep, and so true, that it can but be long
Before I in my weakness may hope to return
Its full measure. But teach me. I live but to learn
How to love you."
The cadence was measured ; no change
In the notes ; none were higher, none lower, in range ;
But exactly and evenly moduled.

XVIII.

O, God—
God of love ! Help this soul, passing under the rod !
. . . The dread passage is made, and the spirit is bowed—
The strong spirit, erstwhile so rebellious and proud !

XIX.

"Helen, now could I die with content ; but I live
With new life, with new hope, to you proudly to give
Each emotion of heart, each conception of brain,
Till the One who gave breath to me takes it again.
Seal with only one kiss the sweet promise you've given,
And I'll sleep, and in dreams get a foretaste of Heaven."

XX.

For no more from her asks he, nor wishes he, now.
He is satisfied. . . . Satisfied ? How, tell me, how
Can he still his heart's long-lasting, clamorous cry,
With this ear-soothing, soft-sounding, mild lullaby ?

. . . Yet this is but a thousand-fold tale that I tell,
Which is told day by day in the world where we dwell,
Of hearts clasping and hugging the shadow of love,
While the substance far hovers the shadow above.

XXI.

O, Love, where in the universe wide can be found
Mystery as inscrutable, wondrous, profound,
As thine own ? On a crust, on a morsel, at times,
Thou canst feed ; then, again, not the fruits of all climes
Can thy greedy, insatiate cravings appease.
There are hours when dark caves above arbors of ease
Thou preferrest ; and others, when there can not bloom
Plants enough thy luxuriant seats to perfume.
When the mood is upon thee, if under thy spell
Thou hast one faithful heart, in content thou wilt dwell
On a lone, desert isle in the farthermost sea ;
Anon, earth's teeming realms must pay tribute to thee.
Giving sometimes thy all, thou dost ask, in return,
Nothing more than the ashes in memory's urn ;
Then, again, for a stiver expended by thee,
Thou demandest the wealth of the Indies in fee !

CANTO FOURTH.

DUTY.

I.

When across the bleak moorlands of sterile Regret
Retrospection's chill winds sweep where Joy's sun has set;
When the wilder blasts out of the caves of Remorse
Leave but blackened intention-wrecks strewn in their course;
When Hope's star, paling sadly her solacing light,
Leaves the sky of the future one long arctic night;
When the demons of Doubt are let loose on the air,
And their whisperings deepen the gloom of Despair;
Then come flitting, like snow-birds in winter's domain,
The fond memories which after heart-storms remain,
As the relics of happiness once we have known.
These still linger to lighten hours weary and lone:
They are few, they are faint, it may be; but yet they
Are our all, and we never can fling them away.

II.

To Mark Landis all now that remained of the past,
With its pleasures and promises, too bright to last,
With its treasures of gold that he once called his own,
Which he would not have bartered for sceptre or crown,
Was a sad, gentle memory. All else had fled,
And was numbered by him with the things that were dead.
This one relic he cherished, and tenderly pressed
To his vacant, and widowed, and desolate breast.

It was sacred to him as to monk crucifix,
And he laid it away in his heart's sacred pyx.

III.

Then, endued with a courage that nothing could daunt,
And a nerve that an Indian warrior might vaunt,
Mark went forth in the world ; looked it straight in the eye ;
Set his face to the breeze, with a soul to defy
Wind and storm ; courted trouble, his heart to enure ;
And gained spirit to struggle, and strength to endure.

IV.

So the world it went on, and its ranks closed again,
As if never had been trace of anguish or pain ;
As if never in heart had a deep chasm yawned ;
As if ne'er had a hope died the morn when it dawned :
E'en as in a great battle the ranks close again,
After clearing the field of the wounded and slain,
Who are missed not, or, missed, only serve to prolong
Some lone evening's tale, or make sad some home song ;—
E'en as in the great war, which was raging apace,
Was the morrow e'er ready with men to replace
Those who fell in the conflict to-day; and the word
"Close the ranks !" was the order that ever was heard.
'Tis the order that rings round the world in all strife ;
'Tis the countersign fixed in the battle of life.

V.

Yea, the war raged apace—raged apace and amain.
Men like cattle, like sheep for the shambles, were slain.
From the Lakes all the way to the Gulf, but one thought
Ruled men's minds ; from the plains to the seaboard they fought;
And the God of the just on each side was implored
To whet in its behalf His avenging, swift sword,

While from altars dyed red by the blood of the slain
He was asked to spread broadcast the spirit of Cain.

VI.

. . . One day, sitting and reading the news from the war,—
Reading listlessly, as one might read from afar
The accounts of a feud 'twixt a red and black race
In earth's uttermost corner,—Mark Landis's face
Was suffused with a scarlet flush, suddenly brought
By the rush through his mind of a sharp, piercing thought,
At perusing a call by the Government made
For enlistments of troops in a new-formed brigade.

VII.

The imperiled republic was in sorest need;
She had poured her best blood war's wild fury to feed;
And now fresh hecatombs were demanded to sate
The unquenchable thirst of the Moloch of hate :
There were lacking more souls to be offered to fill
The grim measure of sacrifice asked of her still.

VIII.

This the thought that stung Landis with sting keen and deep,
And aroused him with smiting of Conscience's whip :
" What a base, what a recreant spirit have I,
To sit thus in a selfish security by,
While the half of a world is in arms! *She* has proved
Grandly true while she has amidst suffering moved,
Like a ministering angel from Heaven sent down,
And my duty through noble example thus shown :
Let me now do that duty as honor shall move,
And as she from her lofty height can but approve.
What though war to my spirit abhorrent may be ?
'Tis no patriot's part such a conflict to flee,

While in peril the nation's life lies. My full share
Of the burden fate lays on my land let me bear."

IX.

With a man like Mark Landis, to form a resolve
Was to act, and to make all great efforts revolve
Round one dominant purpose. His soul was inspired
With his new resolution ; his bosom was fired
With the ardor of noble performance. An hour
Scarce had passed before he was enrolled for the war.

X.

The enlistment of Landis stirred new life among
The youth of the vicinity, and 'twas not long
From the day that his patriot decision was made,
Ere he headed a company in the brigade.



CANTO FIFTH.

RECOGNITION.

I.

Once more, night on the battle-field.
There has been won
A great victory. Blood in dark torrents has run.
Hearts by thousands have been since the morn stilled for aye.
Homes unnumbered in anguish proclaim that the day
Is replete with rare glory.
But cannon no more
At this hour shake the field with their death-speaking roar,
And the shouts of the victors no longer ring forth,
To accompany souls taking last leave of earth ;
For sweet mercy rules now, and the ambulance corps
Gathers grain for the garner from war's threshing-floor ;
While the surgeons and nurses, by torches revealed,
Dress such wounds as need instant relief on the field.

II.

Here, a surgeon discovers a man lying prone,
In a pool of blood even he shrinks to look on.

III.

" My poor fellow ! This was a severe shot, indeed !
In the thigh ! Fearful wounds, those of this kind, to bleed !
It was done by a shell : Ugly gashes they make !
. . . No, ma'am, no ! [to a nurse.] It won't do yet to take

This man into the ambulance! Too much blood flows.
There's an artery severed. Tied once? So it shows;
And done poorly, too!
"Madam, please hold up his head:
He is fainting, I fear, which will surely be bad
For the case.
"Now, my man, if you will but be brave,
By effecting this ligature I'll try to save
Your most badly torn limb, and your life (whose warm tide,
If I do not mistake, ebbs now fast), [which aside
To the nurse was observed.] . . . You're a captain, I see,
And quite young, too.
. . . "What! . . . Ah! So I feared it would be!
You've no stomach for blood, ma'am; that's plain to be seen.
This is far too rough work for one raised as you've been."

IV.

This remark of the surgeon's was caused by a cry
That escaped from the nurse, as a torchlight passed by,
And upon the dark, powder-grimed face threw its glare—
The brave face she was holding so tenderly there.
No sound else passed her lips.
To her task in the dark
She bent, causing the surgeon no further remark.

V.

Meanwhile uttered the sufferer no moan nor cry,
And he only evinced his intense agony,
When the surgeon felt round among tendons and cords,
(Where his fingers seemed clubs and his instruments swords,)
By occasional wincings and cringings of nerve,
As the good man proceeded to cut and to carve,



. . . A cry
That escaped from the nurse, as a torchlight passed by,
And upon the dark, powder-grimed face threw its glare.

And put into some sort of presentable shape
The limb mangled and haggled by shrapnel and grape.

VI.

"And now, Madam," the surgeon said, "if I may ask
That you ride in the ambulance with me, and task
Your assistance still further in this incident,
We'll ourselves take this man to the hospital-tent;
For I tell you that only with greatest of care,
(And perhaps, I should add, with the aid of strong prayer,)
Can the already flickering flame of his breath
Be redeemed from extinguishment speedy in death."

VII.

In tones furtively whispered these last words were said
In the ear of the nurse, in the brief pauses made
In the surgeon's glib talk, while arranging a place
For the man in the ambulance. Easy to trace,
'Midst professional phrases in roughish garb dressed,
Was the deepened anxiety thrilling his breast.

VIII.

When his patient was by his arms ready and stout
In the woe-laden vehicle placed, and the route
To the hospital taken, the surgeon went on
With his chat, till the head of the Captain bent down,
As if fled was the monarch of life from his seat—
Bent down limp on his breast, like a reaped spear of wheat.

IX.

"This is something I dreaded," the surgeon said, pained
Beyond power of concealment. "His system was strained
To a tension too great for e'en his wondrous nerve,
And the task is now desperate life to conserve.

He has swooned, you perceive, Ma'am, from sheer loss of
blood.
. . . But you also appear growing weaker ! You've stood
The scene bravely thus far: bear it out! Take a drop
From this flask: it is whisky—the best. It keeps up
Sinking spirits when nothing else will. It is not
Of the sort which the Government vilely deals out
Through its own commissariat.
. . . "No? Well, 'tis true,
It is not just the drink for a lady like you ;
But war hardens us all to the roughest of things ;
And God knows that for all of the justice it brings,
There's a terrible offset of ill.
"I was wrong
To impose such a task upon you. Being strong,
Stout, and tough, I forget still that others are weak.

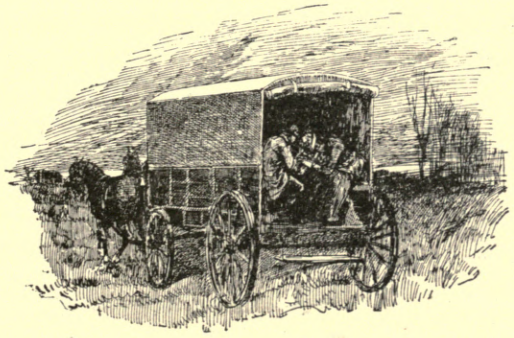
X.

. . . "We're approaching the tent: it is time! . . . You
don't speak!
. . . O, God! She, too, has fainted ! Poor child ! What a
scene,
Sandwiched thus the dark horrors of warfare between !—
His head laid in her lap, and her head on his breast!
They appear like fond lovers, in love's blissful rest;—
And the two total strangers !

XI.

"Here, Sergeant ! Give aid !
I've two persons as lifeless as if they were dead.
Handle tenderly this so strange pair that you see !
From depletion of blood he has fainted, and she
From exhaustion: that's all.

"But, my man, have a care!
Do not be quite so rough! . . . Take him first. Gently!
. . . There!
To her tent, now, drive quickly, the headquarters near.
Don't you see? She's the wife of our new Brigadier!"



CANTO SIXTH.

PRAYER.

I.

O, Religion ! Though history's just muse imputes
The worst wars of the nations to priestly disputes ;
Yet, when wounding and death come along in their train,
From their blood-bearing issues thou dost not abstain.
Thou art ready to bind, and to heal, and to soothe,
The bruised body to balm, or the pillow to smoothe.
Thy bright presence lends ever assuagement to pain,
And the color brings back to the wan cheek again ;
Or, when clouds, hanging heavy and stifling the breath,
Show the Valley where hovers the Shadow of Death,
There, with faith-inscribed banner, thy beaming form stands,
Pointing "over the river" to radiant lands,
Where there never is heard war's tumultuous blare ;
Where the smoke of the battle swells not on the air ;
Where no morning drum beats, and no reveille calls ;
Where no hero is lost, and no champion falls ;
Where the bugle sounds never to ride on the charge;
Where pale cowardice haunts not the field's safer marge;
Where no long marches lie through the summer's hot dust,
Nor the drear rains of autumn, nor winter's harsh frost;
Where no picket looks far with strained eyes for the foe;
Where no signal-lights gleam, and no bivouac-fires glow;

Where the sharpshooter makes not his target the breast
Of the tallest, the proudest, the bravest, the best;
Where no camp-fevers, lurking in mists from the grave,
Shame the sword as they feed on the breath of the brave.

II.

Beneath yon yellow flag* the sharp rifle barks not,
And no cannon's throat there belches forth screaming shot.
'Tis the Hospital Flag: let its color be blest,
And on all 'neath its folds let a benison rest!
Hang back all of your standards, with heraldry proud,
In whose quarterings history's memories crowd,
Through stained centuries running back into the night
Of barbaric dominion of might over right:
Though 'neath each have the brave with the brave greatly
vied,
With the blood of the peoples are all of them dyed!
Bring the Hospital Flag to the farthermost front,
And baptize it in sacred Humanity's font,
With the name, which will live while it graces the air,
Of the Banner of Mercy. Its cross let us wear
As our civilization's best symbol and sign—
As the mark of its touching, for once, the divine.

III.

In the quaint convent-garb of her order, there bent
O'er a wounded man's cot, in the hospital-tent,
A mild Sister of Mercy.

*On the 8th of August, 1884, in General Order No. 90, issued by direction of the War Department of the United States, the Hospital Flag, which had hitherto been a plain yellow one, was changed to a white flag with a red cross in the centre. This was done in accordance with Art. VII of the Convention between the United States and the other civilized powers of the world, held in Geneva, Switzerland, a few weeks prior to the issuance of the order.

The patient still slept;
But not strong was his breathing. Anxiety crept
O'er the face of the nun, as she noted how faint
Were the slow respirations, which thus came and went,
As if balancing whether 'twere better to seek
To keep life in the embers, so low and so weak,
Or to yield up the struggle that wearied the breast,
And sink into the grave's undisturbed, dreamless rest.

IV.

"Holy Mary, be near!" the nun ministrant prayed;
"Be still near; for a spirit lies deep in earth's shade.
Intercede, Virgin Mother, with Him thou didst bear;
For death-whisperings float on the breath of the air!"

V.

Slumber's delicate veil-film was lifted at length,
And the eyelids made show of asserting their strength;
But, fatigued with the task, after casting one look
At the face bending o'er them, the effort forsook.
The sweet nun made no sign, save a peace-speaking smile,
And the sleeper lay voiceless and moveless the while.

VI.

But he slept not.
The soul, of the mind and the sense
Taking counsel, was weighing the blent evidence,
As to which of the shores of the death-severed sea
It was now resting on.
"Am I not at last free?"
Thus it queried; "and have I not reached Paradise?
And is not this an angel attendant?
"Earth's guise,
And its trappings, I thought were by me laid aside
For time's durance. I thought, and I wished, sense had died.

And the face now bent o'er me, so placid, serene,
Is a face such as only in visions I've seen.
Those calm, passionless features, how can they belong
To a spirit not freed from earth's turbulent throng?"

VII.

Thus the soul of the intellect queried. And then,
Strength collecting, the latter resumed the dim train
Of reflection, back wandering to the dark field
Where life's pulsings in silence had seemed to be sealed.

VIII.

"Ah! That strange, wild scene, yonder, in shadows of night—
Shadows cheered by a presence assuagingly bright,—
I had thought that that closed with the dawning of morn
In eternity, whither my spirit seemed borne
Upon pinions of mercy and love.

" For so dense
Was the gathering darkness that curtained the sense,
That the world was shut out from me—all, save the light
From those dark, lustrous eyes which beamed down on my sight;
And I gazed far, far into their depths, and saw there
Something superterrestrial, heavenly fair,
Which then led me so gently, so softly from life,
That I parted with joy from its pain and its strife;
And that luminous presence still lighted my soul,
Breaking loose from the shackles of sentient control,
Through the gathering mist, and the gloom, till the breath
Became tideless and still. And I thought that was death."

IX.

Then the mind was at length with these questionings worn,
And again into regions of Slumberland borne.

X.

Came the surgeon.

"Well, Sister! you're likely to find
Work enough in the new field to which you're assigned,"
He began, in his usual garrulous mood.
"By what name shall I call you, please?"

"Sister Gertrude."

"By the way, a young officer, late on last night,
Was brought hither in rather a dangerous plight,
With a very unpromising femoral wound,
Who, while riding with me in the ambulance, swooned.
Will you please to tell me how does that case progress?"
"He lies yonder, and sleeps."

"Then the danger is less.
Has delirium shown?"

"Not as yet, sir. Too weak
Without aid to move, making no effort to speak,
He lies hovering—"

XI.

"'Twixt the two worlds. That I know.
'Tis a toss-up which wins.

. . . "Pardon, Sister; I show
Less of heart and of sympathy, possibly, than
You may think I should feel. But I take in this man
A strange interest, and I most earnestly hope
We may save him. If only his courage keeps up,
And that ugly and dreaded death-fellow, gangrene,
Our profession's *bête noir*, does not yet supervene,
We can save him, I think.

"Before taking a look
At him, (which I am anxious to do, for with smoke

Was his face blackened so, with his head turned away,
And so dark was the night, that one hardly could say
If he was white or black,) there's a message I bear,
I'll deliver.

"Worn down by exposure, night air,
And miasma, the brave lady who, on the field,
Helped to dress this man's wound, has been forced now to yield
To a raging camp-fever, and bids me ask you
All that human care can for this patient to do,
And in time and eternity her gratitude
Will be yours."

XII.

"I will do so," said Sister Gertrude;
"But has that gentle lady the Virgin implored
To petition the throne of her Son and our Lord
For this soul? For such aid is required."

XIII.

"I can't say,
Tender Sister, through whom she's accustomed to pray,"
Said the surgeon, (who, let it be frankly confessed,
Buttoned less of religion than heart 'neath his vest;)
"But I'll swear that she prays to some one; and I'll lay
A large wager no prayer from her heart goes astray."

XIV.

Honest surgeon, your plainness is gold. Your rough phrase
A great truth for this age, and all ages, conveys.
Let theologists wrangle o'er dogmas and creeds:
How discern they, how gauge they, the soul's sorest needs?
Let the nun through the Virgin her pleadings put forth;
Let the other her prayers without aid send from earth:

If they both start in pureness of heart, they will each
The Great White Throne above with all certainty reach.
This I say, nothing doubting, by virtue of faith
Planted deep in my soul by the Author of breath—
Faith not learned in the halls of divinity schools,
But transcending all creeds and all dogmatic rules.

XV.

The warm heart of the world, beating true, through all time,
To the heart of the victim of Calvary's crime,
Bids me speak for the right of the soul to seek Heaven
In the ways unto it through its mother-faith given,—
Bids me claim that the heart may send upward its plaint
Through the sanctified soul of some favorite saint,
Or through that of the mother the stable who graced;
Or yet through the best One, who unmurmuring faced
All the terrors of death and all demons of hell,
And by love's magic power broke evil's dark spell;
Or, sufficiently strengthened in spirit and grace,
Commune with great Jehovah unveiled, face to face.
Heaven's language is multitongued, and o'er the world,
Wheresoe'er be our risen Lord's banner unfurled,
The glad gift pentecostal its blessings extends,
And to tongues weak and souls weak its loving aid lends.

XVI.

Thus the soul, be it lowly, or ranked with the proud,
With this privilege precious is ever endowed.
Let it pray in a tongue that is lost in the ages,
Or pray in the language of bards or of sages;
In speech that is dainty, æsthetic, and fair,
Grown in culture and taste, culled with delicate care;
Or in dialects sprung from the slums of to-day,
Where humanity's self breathes the breath of decay;

Let it pray in short form, or in long form, or none;
Let it pray in coat, kilt, blouse, cloak, surplice, or gown:
Let the heart but be Godward turned, and God will hear,
Though the plea meet approval of no human ear.

XVII.

For God hears not as man hears,—thrice blessed the thought!
If He did, with what ruin our worship were wrought!
Should the angel of justice e'er critical grow,
And test all of the prayers that ascend from below
By the pure adoration up there recognized,
And admit none but after that standard revised;—
If for prayers out of place, out of taste, out of tense;
If for prayers ill constructed, and wanting in sense;
If for prayers sacrilegious in spirit and tone;
If for prayers in which self is unshrinkingly shown;
If for prayers where the Christ is most deftly belied,
Though by synod, or council, or church ratified;
If for prayers which the veriest pagan would shame;
If for prayers that are Christian-like only in name;—
If, up yonder, I say, the lines closely were drawn,
(The which, praised be all saints, we know ne'er will be done,)
And yon angel each soul should to strict account call
For its prayer-deficits, Heaven pity us all!

XVIII.

See the child at the side of its mother kneel down,
And climb up to its God through the folds of her gown!
Mark the weak, plaintive breath of the soul-bud ascend,
Where divine love and mother-love mingle and blend!
Who shall question the fact that its prayers are all heard,
Though its heart in the main is by mother-love stirred?
O, divinity doctors, when will ye discern,
That like children the peoples the God-love must learn,

And that yet in its childhood humanity kneels
At the feet of the good mother Wisdom, and feels
Its slow way o'er the path by Immanuel trod—
Its slow way, through that mother, to Him, and to God?

XIX.

. . . For the surgeon the nun through the cots led the way
To where, still wrapped in slumber, the pale patient lay.

XX.

One look only the old surgeon cast at the cot,
And intense surprise into expression was wrought.

XXI.

"What! Mark Landis! My dear lad! My favorite! You
Lying here where death's presence lurks closely in view?
And yet I to have handled you thus on the field,
With ne'er once your identity to me revealed!
Well, well, Sister! I *am* getting old, sure enough,—
Old and childish, as well as dull, clumsy, and rough!
He breathes faintly; but there is no death in that sleep!
He will live! If the besom of war does not sweep
His white life from the earth in some battle's red tide,
He will win a name which among men shall abide."

XXII.

Then the surgeon mused thus, as with Sister Gertrude,
On the calm sleeper gazing, in silence he stood:
"My dream faded away, like all visions and dreams!
In his life my girl no beauty saw, and, it seems,
None in hers he; and I as his lover was left.
And I do love you, boy, though of that hope bereft!
Even old men like me must have something to love
That is beautiful, life's work-day moiling above;
And you're all that remains to my dried up old heart,
My young Raphaël, sent to give new life to art!"

XXIII.

The good surgeon from waking the sleeper refrained,
Nor until his deep slumbers were broken remained;
But went on to his duties, 'mid sickness and pain,
With a heart as unselfish as rugged in grain.

* * * *

XXIV.

Dark-brown eyes, sunk and hollow; dark hair, flowing wide;
Cheeks, once flushed, shrunk and sallow; form wasted, lips dried:
Is this she who went from her fair prairie-home forth,
At stern duty's demand, to give sacrifice worth,
To give purpose to effort, and strength to resolve,
And one problem in human existence to solve?

XXV.

"Ah! So soon in the struggle o'ercome with defeat!
So soon forced to effect a disastrous retreat!
All my brave resolutions, my firmness, my strength,
Have wrought only this end, have reached but to this length!
And dared had I to think, if by chance we should meet,
I could look in his face, and his soul therein greet,
And then go on my way, to the world speaking fair,
And a look of serenest impassiveness wear,
While no shrinking nor shambling my heart should betray:
Yet the first glance wrought wreck, and—I fell by the way!

XXVI.

"In the night, in the dark, by the torches' red glare,
O, Mark Landis, why should ruthless fate bring you there?

Out of blood, out of danger, in deep agony,
You there came, in the shadows, with greeting to me!
O, the anguish of soul! O, the tempting of heart!
Each black fiend from perdition seemed plying his art.
How so long I endured it, I know not—I know
Only that when weak nature gave way, I bowed low,
Bowed my head, and sank down on his breast!
"Blessed Name,
Christ all-merciful, to whom the tempter once came,
Pity, pardon, and aid! I am weak, I am frail!
Thou great Heart of Compassion, O, let me not fail!

XXVII.

"In late days I had wished, I had cherished the thought,
That the motherhood-whisperings tenderly brought
To the ear of my heart might call love into life;
Might speak hope to the breast; might sound truce to the strife.
Even these have been vain!

XXVIII.

. . . "Will he die?
"At the thought
Runs a shudder through all my poor heart. He must not!
Living, he is a burden fate lays on my soul,
And I've but to accept without murmur my dole;
But, if dead, his untombed, martyr-spirit would be
Ever present, a witness accusing to me."

XXIX.

Then she breathed this strong prayer:
"O, eternal Lord God,
Who didst bring from dark chaos the sweet, blooming sod,
And didst plant in bright Eden all things that were fair,
And then made in thine image the man to rule there;

Take thou into thy keeping this image of thine—
On no fairer did ever thy gladsome sun shine;
Do not let him die now; earth hath need of such men!
They are few; they are kings in humanity's reign.
Raise him up to go out in the glory of youth,
And proclaim and be witness to life's golden truth!
Raise him up to prove faithful to aims of his soul;
Raise him up to show forth, as years onward shall roll,—
Be they few, be they many for him,—that one heart,
One at least, in this wide world, hath no lot nor part
In earth's greed; that one soul can in strength rise above
The all-grasping, all-hoarding, hard self-gain of love."

XXX.

Thus she prayed, and she afterward mused:
"And then,
Must I go through the ordeal—meet him again?
I do thank thee, my Lord, that my illness is great;
For it keeps me away from the tortures that wait
For me yonder, where, if there shall nursing hands fail,
Mine must not be withheld, though my weak spirit quail,—
Yonder, where calmly, greatly enduring, he lies,
Where in anguish of body, it may be, he dies!"

XXXI.

God have pity upon her! God pity all who,
With such crosses as hers, pass this weary world through!

XXXII.

O, ye Jews of the heart's realm, take heed how ye prove
Recreant to the Heaven-owned spirit of love!
If on Golgotha ye crucify it to-day,
On the third day the stone from its tomb rolled away
Shall be found, and the new-risen, recognized lord,
Once transfigured, step forth, and be thenceforth adored!

CANTO SEVENTH.

FAITH.

I.

Slowly faded the rays of an autumnal sun,
And a soft twilight left, in whose shade sat the nun,
Her pale face with anxiety less clouded o'er
Than at any hour in her close watching before;
For, though weak from his wounds' fevered wasting and wear,
Mark was gaining beneath her assiduous care.
While submissive his spirit, and docile his mood,
It yet taxed all the efforts of Sister Gertrude,
His too restive mind's bent toward expression to curb,
And to guard it from all that might tend to disturb
The so much needed calmness of nerve and of brain,
Which the surgeon had urged her to seek to maintain.

II.

"Sister," thus Mark persisted, "while watching you move
In your rounds here, impelled by the spirit of love,
Strange reflections my mind have been wandering through."

III.

"The mind should not be tasked by such troublous review,"
Urged the Sister; "there can be no rest while the thought
Is with burdened humanity's problems o'erwrought."

IV.

Still unsatisfied, Landis continued, in strain
Of intensity heightened by tension of brain:

"It were easier, Sister, to give ample vent
To my close-crowding thoughts, than attempt their restraint.
An idea your cherished faith's symbols suggest
Has with emphasis strong on my mind been impressed:
Of what prejudice are we the creatures. and how
Warps antipathy all of our lives!"

V.

"Our minds bow
'Neath the yoke of inherited bias," explained
Sister Gertrude, who would with her charge have refrained
From discussing the theme.

VI.

"And I fain would believe,"
Answered he, "that our natures the years may retrieve
From such bias at length. But that yoke we hug still,
With infatuate fondness that weakens the will,
All awry turns the judgment, and leaves us, instead
Of the lords of our reason, but serfs, blindly led
By nursed rancors, gray hates, and false leanings—the train
A gangrened education has bred in the brain."

VII.

"Nay, my brother! Be not to your nature unjust,
And sweet charity's influence do not mistrust
In the motiving of human actions. Have faith
That precedence love over antipathy hath
In developing credence, determining thought,
And the sentiments shaping through life-lessons wrought."

VIII.

"Sister, charity breathes in your every word;
Yet my own life-experiences do not accord
With your roseate view. For instance, I learned
In my youth a hard lesson your faith that concerned.

I was told by a mother as gentle as you,
And as tender as on sacred Hermon the dew,
That a symbol of sin is the habit you wear;
That no less is the cross at your side that you bear;
That your prayers are all blasphemies, and that for naught
Count your merciful deeds in just Deity's thought;
That no savor with Heaven's immutable King
Have the vows that you pay, or the alms that you bring.

IX.

"And, my Sister, while that sainted being, if now
Looking down from the realms where her seraph-notes flow,
Would to you waft a blessing from her crystal home,
Dear as any pronounced by your father in Rome,
Yet on earth were she still, in this blazing to-day,
In this glorying age of the intellect's sway,
She would pray that my soul be redeemed from the snare
Of the tempter, now over me thrown, in the care
That with so tender grace you have on me bestowed;
And yet this you have done in the name that e'er glowed
In her soul, as the one pure, the one fadeless star,
Which lit up the whole earth for her, blazoned afar
All her course through life's shades, over death's darkened
sea,
And on into the realms where her spirit is free.
And that mother of mine, with her soul all divine,
Should she come now to earth, could not pray at the shrine
Where you offer your vows: they would open the door
And would bid her begone, like a leper impure."

X.

Then the Sister replied, pointing upward her hand,
While her features a bow of faith radiant spanned,

And her cadenced voice rang like a silvery bell,
In the hush of the twilight's mysterious spell,
Adding charm to her words:

"There blooms charity *there:*
There'll bloom charity *here*, when time's seasons are fair.
We must wait for them long, for all slowly they climb
Up the track of the years; and in fullness of time,
What we now see but on the horizon's dark verge
Will in glory, and grandeur, and gladness emerge.
But in my day I look for it not.

"Heaven's days,
And its seasons, its objects, its means, and its ways,
Are not earth's. This we mortals are prone to forget,
And forgetting thus, do we repine, chafe, and fret.
If we could but with waiting faith hope's signs discern,
If the lesson of sweet, restful trust we could learn,
Ah, content were we, then, God's long thought to abide,
And we'd say of whatever things come on life's tide:
'They are fair, they are good, they are right; God is just;
All things doeth He well; Him in all things we trust.'"

XI.

"Amen!" fell in response from a voice low and weak,
Which from out of the ambient shade seemed to speak.

XII.

Sister Gertrude, in startled surprise, turned, and there,
In the deepening shade that enveloped the air,
Like a spectral appearance, a wasted form stood,
Halting, shrinking, in doubting and hesitant mood.

XIII.

Came as well from the voice of the patient, "Amen!"

XIV.

"I have come," said the voice in the shade, "to obtain
Information of one in your charge. I have been
Very ill since the night when they carried him in
From the field. [Just then Mark turned his head in surprise,
And there gleamed a strange look in his lustreful eyes.]
The good surgeon has failed to keep me well advised
Of his patient's condition."

XV.

"Were you not apprised,"
Asked the nun, "that our good, gray, old surgeon is dead?"

XVI.

"*Dead?*" exclaimed the sad voice from the darkening shade.
"*Dead?*" repeated the word weakened tones from the cot.
"*Dead!*" rejoined the calm nun. "At the front he was shot,
Through a horrid mistake, by sharpshooters concealed,
While exposing himself to bear off from the field,
In the latest engagement, a brave orderly,
Who was mortally wounded."

XVII.

"O, great soul, to me
Undeservedly rendering aid Heaven sent
On that night when I sadly through death's shadows went!"
Said the patient. And then, for a space, not a word
Through the sombre and sorrow-filled silence was heard.

XVIII.

"Do you not need assistance?" the halting voice asked.

XIX.

"Not from you, gentle lady! Although I am tasked
To the limit utmost of my nerves, I am strong,
While not here, but upon your sick couch you belong.
So, return, and ask God for new strength; for He knows,
Soon enough your good aid will be needed, wars woes,

New and fresh, to alleviate. Wave after wave
Of blood breaks into anguish or into the grave.
Have no fear, lady, that your white hands may lack work
While you linger in camp. Dangers numberless lurk
In clouds hanging o'erhead, with calamity filled.
Scarce an hour but our hearts with fresh terrors are thrilled.
Ever comes the slow roll of the ambulance dread,
Bearing wounded, or sick, or the dying, or dead.
Though none dear to you fall by the next heavy blow,
Forms that some hearts hold precious 'twill surely lay low."

XX.

While the nun was thus speaking, there gathered around,
In the tent yet unlighted, dim forms, with heads bound,
And limbs splintered and bandaged, on crutches, and canes;
Some yet bearing the last battle's dark, ugly stains;
Standing, sitting on cots, or upon the bare ground,
Making never a motion, nor signal, nor sound.

XXI.

Then the lady-guest, half shrinking, questioned the nun
For the meaning of this so strange troop, all in dun,
Thus in aspect sepulchral and stillness arrayed
Round this captain of mercy, a phantom brigade.

XXII.

"They have come, these brave fellows," responded the nun,
"As accustomed since my labors here have begun,
At this hour to sit silently by, listening,
While the Evening Hymn to the Virgin I sing."

XXIII.

"And may I be permitted to stand with the throng,
And to listen with them to your reverent song?"

XXIV.

"I shall only be happy to count you with them,"
Sister Gertrude replied; and thus rendered the hymn:

Evening Hymn to the Virgin.

I.

Gently the earth by the night-dews is kissed;
Falls like a mantle the twilight's soft mist.
Mother of God, in the heart's loneliness,
Come, at this still hour, to soothe and to bless.
Sweet Virgin Mother! O, spotless of birth,
Favored of Heaven, thrice favored of earth;
Mary Immaculate, heed thou our prayer:
Aid us our trials and sorrows to bear!
Ave, Maria!

II.

Name that comes laden with love of a world;
Name at whose pleading life's war-flag is furled;
Name that can banish the fiend of despair;
Name that can scatter the dark clouds of care;
Name that is blended with all that is blest;
Name of all mortal names dearest and best;
Look from thy throne of pure jasper on high;
Feel the heart's agony; hear the heart's cry!
Ave, Maria!

III.

Through all the ages of life and of time
Runneth thy mission of mercy sublime;
Through all the changes the swift years have brought;
Through all the evils that sinning hath wrought;
Through all the weaknesses flesh hath confessed;
Through all the achings that anguish the breast;
Blesséd of body and blesséd of name,
Mother of Sorrows, thou still art the same!
Ave, Maria!

IV.

Thou at the feet of the Crucified One,
While in dread horror was darkened the sun,
Stood, as in agony quivered His frame,
Faithful in death to the Holiest Name.
Thus, when the sunshine is hid from our path,
And we are compassed by shadows of death,
Treading the wine-press that His feet have trod,
Pray for us, watch o'er us, Mother of God!
Ave, Maria!



Ave, Maria!

XXIV.

In the shadows the hymn died away.
The dim troop
To the cots or their barracks dispersed, while the group
Around which they had gathered remained.
A strange spell
Seemed to hold Helen Rolfe to the spot. Who shall tell
What beneficent influences from the seen
And the unseen combined, in that hour so serene,
To speak peace to her heart? Was it part of the breath
Of the Infinite, which, in the precincts where death
Was an oft welcomed guest, and where suffering's home
Had been fixed, wrought by miracle cheer out of gloom?
Was it benison breathed by the sufferer there?
Was it blessing that flowed from that rhythmical prayer?
Surely something divine o'er her spirit had come,
While she stood in the gloaming, pale, moveless, and dumb.

XXVI.

But no marvel attached to one sweet influence
There exerted upon both her soul and her sense;
For she beckoned, from where in the dun gloom she stood,
Anxiously to the close-hooded Sister Gertrude;
And then, twining her arm round the waist of the nun,
Thus she whispered, as softly as mercy-streams run:
"I have learned to suppress the emotions I feel,
Else heart had into voice burst, dear Madame Marsile!"

XXVII.

Sister Gertrude replied, as she thrilled with delight:
"The weak voice that came out of the shadows of night
Rang like some recollected, melodious strain,
Yet till now could I not follow memory's train.

But, my child, bear in mind, that of Madame Marsile
Earth knows no more forever. I cannot reveal
Of the past aught to you; but in future, whene'er
I can aid your dear heart to lift, lighten, or cheer,
This of tasks the most grateful, still, Helen, will be,
That my life, in its multiplied griefs, leaves for me.
I shall trust to my darling's discretion, to show
By no look, by no sign, that we each other know,
Save as workers together in sweet mercy's cause,—
Save as bearers of burdens for hearts that have woes."

XXVIII.

Sister Gertrude returned to her patient, while still
Helen silent stood, waiting, beneath the same spell.
. . . She had felt at heart grateful that Mark had not spoken,
And left still the silence between them unbroken,
Save through words but directed to Sister Gertrude,
Who as barrier gentle in panoply stood,
Apart keeping these hearts, of each other afraid,
Like two combatants, warily watching in shade.

XXIX.

. . . Would he speak again? Should she await a last word—
It might be the last e'er from his lips to be heard?
She had dared not to look in his face. She would go:
He would not blame her silence: the cause he would know.
Than she came, she could go with a far lighter heart,
Heaven be thanked!
Musing thus, she made move to depart,
When the pale patient spoke to the nun:

XXX.

"I would say,
Ere the lady shall go from this presence away,

That I feel a great strength in me springing to-night;
And that while I shall still, till the last ray of light
From earth's sun beams upon me, her memory hold
As a sacred memento, more prized than all gold,
And unceasingly bless her for there, on that night,
Whose dark horrors gleam vividly still on my sight,
Calling back the fast vanishing breath to a breast
Whose throbs else had been stilled in oblivion's rest;
And that while the remembrance of that night of gloom
Will to me make life dearer in years that shall come:
Yet I now feel hope strong, and shall not need her care;
And my heart would less bend 'neath a load it must bear,
Would she leave me to your tender watchfulness here,
And seek strength for her duties to others more dear,
Or where trials so stern may not wear her young days,
Which must not be so rudely exposed to war's ways.
For her years are too precious to break in their morn;
And too dear is her being to one who has borne
In the battles of life and of war well his part,
And deserved the best love that can spring from her heart.
. . . This I utter in kindness supreme. Does she see
That I say what is best both for her and for me?"

XXXI.

O, the grace of this speech! O, the rich, tender swell
Of these eloquent words, which now soothingly fell,
Not on passion-torn feelings, wrought wild with unrest,
But upon a subdued, humble, dutiful breast!
She could answer with calmness:

"I feel, and I know,
The advice is the wisest. Content I shall go."

XXXII.

And she passed through the shadows, out into the night;
While Mark Landis thought earth had lost all of its light.

CANTO EIGHTH.

CONSOLATION.

I.

Nature's heart stirred anew with the forthcoming spring.
Tree, shrub, plant, bulb, and kernel, each life-holding thing,—
Roots that round Mother Earth's old heart close twined and clung,
Moss, and fern, into sprout, bud, or blossom had sprung.
. . . .With her earth-mother in sweet accord, a new soul
Helen Rolfe had felt leaping within her, which stole
From her eyes the expression that there had prevailed,
And their olden, full meaning for weary months veiled,
Now investing her glance with a warm brilliancy,
Which recalled the young prairie-girl, joyous and free,
To the generous, patient, and fond husband, who
The test years had bridged o'er with love fervent and true,
That between maidenhood and full womanhood lay,
Crowning yesterday's hope with the trust of to-day.
Then her fair body blossomed in beauty, and bore
What e'en Eden lacked—earth's sweetest, balmiest flower—
Motherhood.

II.

Now with gratitude Helen bowed low
To the Author of life; and a reddening glow
Tinged the gray of her eastern horizon, where hope
Had been struggling so long and so hard to mount up
And shed forth on existence its fresh, golden rays,
To enliven, and brighten, and gladden her days.
Greater joy not old Sarah's breast swelled when she went
To her God with the promised manchild to her sent,
Than this furnace-tried, old-young heart tremblingly felt,
When, with babe in her arms, a Madonna, she knelt
Before Him who had led her along stony ways,
Through dark, tortuous paths, and through long, sunless days.

III.

When a hero a victory winneth, exultant break forth
Pæans, jubilant, loud, and resounding through earth.
When bright genius achieveth success, cometh Fame,
Pealing loudly her trumpet, and sounding its name
For all nations and peoples. But when in the heart
Is a triumph accomplished, no couriers start,
Its great tidings to welcoming throngs to proclaim,
To be hailed with rejoicings and roars of acclaim;
And when motherhood wins over weariness long,
Its rejoicings float forth on the bosom of song,—
Not such song as through shouting throats loudly may flow,
But the music of lullaby, tender and low.
And this, then, was the melody, soft, sweet, and mild,
Helen Rolfe sang in joy to her heart and her child:

Lullaby Song.

I.

Pillow thy head upon mother's soft breast,
Darling, in gentlest of slumber to rest.
Listen to mother's songs, sung but for thee:
Lullaby! Fairies thy guardians be!

II.

Lullaby, precious one! Mother's quick ear
Faintest of breathings of baby can hear;
Mother can feel the dear little heart throb;
Mother can catch the least slumbering sob.

III.

She in the dark sees the gleam of thine eyes;
She through all noise hears thy faintest of sighs;
She gets thy meaning by mother's own art—
Rules of interpreting graved on her heart.

IV.

See! Baby's hand tries its mother's to clasp!
Baby's wee fist her white bosom would grasp!
Baby-strength wonderful! Marvelous skill!
Sways all the household, does baby's weak will!

V.

Lullaby, baby! Whatever betide,
Murmur, and mother will be at thy side.
Mother's heart's blood would be poured out for thee,—
Poured out like water, if need there should be.

VI.

Mother o'er baby each moment stands guard;
O'er its each movement keeps fond watch and ward;
Mother stands ready, when baby shall cry,
Waiting to kiss the new tear from each eye.

VII.

Mother looks forward, with tremulous prayer,
Forward to years with their burdens of care;

Sees with foreboding the fledgling soul
Fly from the shelter of mother's control.

VIII.

And, as her broodings these shadowings bring
Mother more closely to baby doth cling.
Rest, while life's morn calls thee only to rest;
Lullaby! Lullaby! Sleep on this breast!

* * * *

IV.

Passed two seasons then by, with their light loads of care;
(Loads the heaviest Helen had now strength to bear;)
And the sunshine again through her heart's windows streamed,
And her days with perennial interest teemed.
Was she happy? If happiness highest consist,
As some ethical reasoners strongly insist,
In the constant employment of head and of heart,
Then was Helen now thoroughly happy. Her part
She was bravely performing as mother and wife,
And for Richard distilling the nectar of life.



CANTO NINTH.

HEROISM.

I.

Richard Rolfe was a man who, in war as in peace,
Took the world at its best—made the most of life's lease.
Never scorning promotion, no means he neglected
Placing him in the way of such favors expected.
With courage proved, which he was known to possess,
He combined judgment, talent, tact, skill, and address;
And, prompt ever at summons of duty, he bore
A superb reputation in his army corps,
And was toward its leadership pushing his way,
When, in leading a charge, on one glory filled day,
With a ball in his breast he rolled down from his horse,
And awhile lay unhelped in the battle's wild course,
Till an officer, there passing with his command,
Paused to aid him.

II.

"What! General Rolfe! O, my friend,
How you bleed! Corporal! Lend me your haversack:
Place it under his head. . . . Now, I'll try to keep back
This swift rushing of blood, till a surgeon appears,
Or the stretchers arrive. I have serious fears
Of an artery severed: if these be well based,
All depends on no time nor blood running to waste;

And I'll stay here, e'en though I shall risk reprimand
For neglecting my post; but the next in command
Will be glad of the chance my battalion to take,
And a record for bravery in my place to make."

III.

"'Tis Mark Landis! God bless you! Some water, please! . . .
No,
'Tis no artery severed that causes this flow,
But a great minie-ball that came crashing in here,
Near my lungs; yet I think it has closed my career.
My poor Helen! God help her true heart bear the blow!
O, my friend, I am grateful, in this hour, to know
You are here, to bear her my last words, if I die,
As I think I must."

IV.

"Dick! You must *not!* If 'twere I,
Little grief it would be; but your life must be saved
For the country, for which death so often you've braved;
But, still more, for the loved ones—your wife, and your child.
Do not move, but lie lower! These bullets fly wild!"

V.

"Mark, you speak of the child, whom you never have seen.
What a treasure and comfort to us has she been!
She is so like her mother!
"My God! It is hard
To give up the world now, with my life so fair-starred!"

VI.

"You'll be saved! Only, Dick, make no movement, by all
You hold dear!"
"You bleed too, Mark!"
"'Twas but a spent ball."
"But your left arm hangs down: it is shattered, I fear!"

VII.

"Never mind that; though bullets are plentiful here,
I admit. But you've had, Dick, the bad luck to fall
In a spot to cross-firing exposed.
"Corporal,
With your bayonet and with my sword let us try
And a trench burrow, where my brave friend here may lie
Till the stretchers reach us, which in coming are slow.
But the boys have their hands full to-day, I well know.
. . . That's sufficient. Please help lift him into it.
Thanks!
Now, my good Corporal, hasten back to the ranks,
And get out of this rough, raking shot-hail alive,
If you can. I'll return when relief shall arrive
For my charge. . . . Do not wait, for each moment the fire
Hotter grows!"

VIII.

It is dread of no death-missile dire
Causes halting in steps of the Corporal, here,
As he stands with an eye that knows nothing of fear.

IX.

"Major! Through these three blood-sprinkled years I have shared
With yourself, at your side, all the dangers you've dared;
And shall I now desert my commander, my friend,
In death's presence, and crawl where less dangers attend,
Like a coward? Ah, major! ask not this of me!
Let me stay, and the brunt share, whatever it be!"

X.

Major Landis was moved as the valiant are moved,
When the faith of kin spirits through trial is proved.



He staid poised for a moment, his eye lustrous yet;
One look toward the now mantling and purpling sunset. . . .

The emotions within him words failed to attest,
And they only found voice in the throbs of his breast.

XI.

Now, there came the sharp whiz of a rifle-ball by;
A slight movement by Landis; a gleam of his eye;
And his right arm fell helpless and limp at his side.

XII.

"You again hit! O, God!" the brave Corporal cried,
"Death comes swiftly!"

XIII.

And scarcely was this sentence uttered,
When this private hero some word barely muttered
In faintness, which sounded like "mother"; and then
Fell a corpse to the earth, with a ball through his brain.

XIV.

Standing there, undismayed, though with twin woundings maimed,
With quick death on all sides, thus Mark Landis exclaimed:
"O, great heart of true valor! Was ever, in days
When fair chivalry ruled among men, and its lays
Tuned the peoples to honor, such knightliness shown?
Though your deeds shall ne'er echo in earthly renown,
Yet the angel who makes up the record above
Your devotion will write with a pen dipped in love;
And the sacrifice born in your true, loyal breast,
Entrance for you shall gain where the brave calmly rest,
And your all-daring soul, though as scarlet your sins,
With a regeneration baptismal shall cleanse."

XV.

Though with loss of blood weakened, and pale, yet Mark still
Firmly stood, buttressed by his strong, resolute will—

Stood erect, as if ranged for parade or review;
When a shrapnel-shell fragment his shoulder crashed through.
. . . He staid poised for a moment, his eye lustrous yet;
One look toward the mantling and purpling sunset;
Then he fell as the stag of the forest may fall,
When in swift career checked by the huntsman's sure ball.

XVI.

. . . The sharp firing had slackened, though little was left
To be hit; for Mark Landis, of all strength bereft,
Lay there prone on the ground, his two brave friends between;
And the bleeding and dead formed a ghastly grim scene—
Such a scene, as, alas, could too often be viewed
Where war's Juggernaut made its dread progress in blood.
Came the stretchers at last, after tiresome delay,
And this trio of wounded and dead bore away:
Two to struggle to keep still the bauble of life,
And the one to rest peacefully after the strife.



CANTO TENTH.

TRIUMPH.

I.

When to Landis and Rolfe on the field relief came,
Little heeded Mark whither they bore him. The name
And directions Rolfe gave to the men were to him,
In his weakness from bleeding, like dream-voices dim;
And the first he knew clearly was when he awoke
The next day, and glanced up, and encountered the look,
Unimpassioned and calm, which, in twilight shades dun,
Two short years now agone, he had thought but to shun.

II.

Side by side lay the heroes, on neighboring cots,
As they lay on the field where blood mingled their lots.
Side by side lay the patients; nor was it a nun
Who attended them. Helen's nurse-work, though begun
Upon him unto whom to herself she had vowed
Heart and hand to yield up, ended not when she bowed
To the yoke that stern conscience upon her imposed,
Neither had it with advent of motherhood closed.

III.

The true woman, who, strong in a purpose sublime,
Puts her hands to the plow, no impedings of time
Nor of circumstance e'er can induce to look back,
Though regret's phantom shadows be thrown on her track.

She puts proud man to scorn in her continent faith,
Which no perils, nor pangs, nor fierce testings can scath;
She sets strong man at naught in intuitive sight,
Catching glimpses of dawn while he sees yet but night.

IV.

Side by side, there they lay, at her feet, at her will,
At her beck, as meek children submissive and still,
Their strong bodies in utter subjection to her,
As for years their strong hearts, without doubt or demur.
O, fair queen of two realms, that earth's barrier parts,
At thy girdle hang keys of what grandly true hearts!
And while on shall flow seasons, there never will be
To unlock either one any duplicate key.
Thou in both art, and still there wilt be, while the tides
Come and go, while the firmament's star-wealth abides:
Here, and yonder, where bridals and bindings are not,
And where we as the angels shall be, without blot.
Such are love's never-ceasing sweet miracles, wrought
Still to-day as when through them the blest Master taught;
And to-day doubters many love's mission distrust,
Till their hands into love's piercèd side have been thrust.

V.

Calm, indeed, and with feeling unmoved, was the look
That on Mark's surprised sight, when he wakened, thus broke
From eyes which through stern trials a many had gone,
And the strength that in trial lies duly had drawn;
But to this strength there came the assistance of prayer,
Firm resolve, and a nerve that all perils could dare,
When occasion such daring demanded:
Yet these
Not alone formed the brave Helen's strong guarantees.

There was one thing resolve to sustain, if all, all
Else had failed. This one thing was that which, since the fall
In the Garden, a woman has been deemed unable to keep
From her husband—a secret.
Howe'er sore and deep
Were her trials and heart-complications between
Rolfe and Landis, no word to the former had been,
In the moments of confidence closest, revealed,
Of the one secret treasure her heart had concealed.

VI.

Now, for this, who shall stand forth with stones, to be hurled
At poor Helen? If one without sin in the world
Can be found, let such one the first stone at her cast,
Else, forgiven, shall this her transgression be passed.

VII.

Robert Burns,—and forever, while throb human breasts,
While bloom freshly the braes where he peacefully rests,
And through emerald banks flows loved Ayr to the sea,
Shall his memory fragrant and benisoned be,—
Gave to one of the friends he held dear this advice,
Which will surely pass current where wisdom hath price:
That in heart-confidence one should "keep something still
To one's self, one would scarcely to any one tell."
I could wish that the charmed Rhymer Robin had added
This thought-filament through the same needle threaded:
One should leave something still in heart-searching unasked;
Should in some points the confidence leave still untasked.
Were these principles followed, in life and in love,
What strong factors of harmony would they not prove!

VIII.

Ah, good husband, that last query, useless, unkind,
With which you, with persistency foolish and blind,

Still kept touching the quick of your wife's nettled heart,
Was the one which has likely your souls torn apart,
Ne'er again to be joined in the durance of years.
And what good has it done you? You've learned where with tears
The lone grave of a long buried love was bedewed—
Where the youth-planted yew has in shaded vale stood.
Do you not some such grave in your own breast conceal,
Which 'twere wrenching your heart to be forced to reveal?

IX.

O, fond wife, let that question die out on your lips;
For it may bring to love's light a death-dark eclipse.
It may gain you the knowledge that somewhere a heart
Treads regret's weedy path, in which *he* once had part.
Will this shed through your darkened heart gladdening rays?
Will this sweeten your home, or make joyous your days?

X

Though in no way (as frequently shown heretofore)
A philosopher, Rolfe had a usable store
Of world-wisdom, which stood him in excellent stead,
And kept healthy his heart, and well balanced his head.
In his love he went never the record beyond;
(A phrase, this, of which lawyers and statesmen are fond,
And not very poetic, but just what I need
To describe this true man, whose each thought was a deed,
And who into a faith life's realities wrought,
That was with the tense soul of earth's earnestness fraught;)
Helen's heart he had never with probe burrowed round
After some foreign substance which might there be found;
But such love as she gave him he gratefully took,
And it gilded his days, and red-lined his life-book.

XI.

Helen saw with distinctness the issue before her,
And the pride of resolve in great spirits came o'er her.
Her husband must see not one quaver in her;
Not a muscle must change, no emotion must stir;
And withal must she never in gentleness lack
To the guest-patient there. On no nun's patient back
Could she place the hard burden.
For Richard had said,
When brought back to her, mangled and bleeding, and laid
Side by side with Mark Landis:
"His case, dear, demands
Care and nursing from you. Only your tender hands
Should dress wounds that were taken to shield me from death.
Do I ask too much, darling?" he added, his breath
Faint and weak. "If of stranger-help need there shall be,
Let me beg that it shall be bestowed upon me.

XII.

"Could your hovering spirit a witness have been
Of that wildly terrific and ghastly grand scene,
Where with bared brow my friend, my protector, stood, crowned
With the smile of a martyr for sacrifice bound,
Such as that with which heroes unflinchingly meet
The dark frownings of fate and its summonings greet,
Shielding me with his form from the hot leaden rain,
This my urging were needless for him to obtain
At your hands but such nursing as woman bestows
On her own when her heart with love's tenderness glows.
'Twas no marvel that one of his men, true to him
As he to his ideal of courage supreme,

With an ardor infectious and dauntlessness fired,
Nerved as noble despair nerves the brave, and inspired
By the calmness with which death's own front he defied,
Pleaded hard for permission to die at his side,
And for Mark and for me poured his purple life there,
Freely, gently, as maiden to Heaven her prayer."

XIII.

It was thus that the husband the wife had besought
On behalf of the friend.
Then the swift-sweeping thought
Had at first touched her mind, in confession to fall
On her knees before Richard, and tell to him all;
And the cowardly ghosts of suggestion athwart
Her soul's pathway had flitted, and shrieked to her heart:
"Seek not thou to comply with thy husband's request!
Venture not to nurse here this so dangerous guest!
Him near have not! Thou dar'st not! Thou'lt shrink!
Thou wilt fail!
Try it not! Tempt not fate! In the test thou wilt quail;
And far worse thus to fail than just now to retreat,
And cast jewels withheld at thy lord's loyal feet!"

XIV.

And 'twas something of that courage Mark had displayed
On her spirit had seized; for, unswerved, undismayed,
She had risen, while round her wreathed smile passing fair,
Like the aureole calendared saints only wear,
Beating back the dark demons of fear into shade,
And, with look sadly sweet yet firm purposed, had said:
"Yes, my husband, your wish I will meet, and our friend
With a sisterly care I will nurse, I will tend."

XV.

Hungry, ravenous, savage, the tiger of war
Two of God's images to deface and to mar
Had done all that it could; it had torn, it had crashed,
It had bitten, and battered, and shattered, and mashed.
Hands and knives of skilled surgeons long busy were kept,
Cleaning up where the besom of battle had swept;
And when they in the work had performed their due share,
Helen Rolfe took the patched-up frames into her care,
And poured balm on the gashes the tiger-teeth made,
Into life nursing powers that prostrate were laid.

XVI.

It was hard, heavy, nerve-trying, heart-wearing work,
Though for never a moment came temptings to shirk;
For 'twas something apart from, beyond, and above
What we mortals are wont to pronounce earthly love,
That gave strength to her hands, and a deft lightness lent
To the touch of her fingers, as gently she bent
O'er the wounds, handling tenderly bandage and splint,
Plying lotion and liniment, linen and lint.
Yet her two subject-patients she ruled rigidly,
And was firm, as a faithful nurse ever should be.
Little time did she have sympathy to display:
Deeds to do came more swiftly than words came to say.

XVII.

Of the wound of the General there was grave doubt.
Closely nestled the ball next the lungs. "Cut it out?"
To Rolfe thus said the surgeon; "no! If you would see
Any more of earth's days, ask it not. It would be
Such a blow at life's resonant organ to deal,
As its valves in eternity's silence would seal."

And, as might deadly, venomous serpent lie coiled,
Still, but ready to spring, in the lap of a child,
There the missile yet stayed, holding ever the key,
As death-guest, to the chamber of life's mystery.

XVIII.

Major Landis's case was more serious still,
And presented a problem for surgical skill.
For some days it was questionable whether Mark
Could survive the blood-loss, and the prospect was dark
That the life so oft periled would be any more
By time's current borne into the hazard of war.

XIX.

"A remarkably phased constitution is his.
Upon sounding his lungs, I'm convinced that it is
A clear case of tubercular phthisis that we
Have before us to deal with, when we shall be free
From the grave complications the fractures have caused;
Thus one ill on another is superimposed,
Rendering the conditions unfavoring," said,
With oracular voicing, a surgeon, whose head,
Though of solid professional learning as full
As a chestnut of meat, yet small knack had to cull
From life's facts differential the knowledge they speak,
And, by gauging that knowledge by science, to seek
Where lies wisdom the golden, whose secrets consist
But in fitting conclusions to facts that exist,
(In the place of adapting facts so as to suit
Coined conclusions,) and showing, as logic's ripe fruit,
The relations all facts to their basic truths bear.

XX.

This philosophy, clear as the azure of air,
Was beyond this sage scalpel-man's mental purview;
For he never the truth from its well-bottom drew.
He had ever with facts stopped, which, fitting his thesis,
Susceptible were of a kin exegesis;
While facts at him staring in broadest daylight,
Scintillating with rays as the diamond bright,
Which with preconceived views of his tallied not well,
Which a totally different tale had to tell,
And with adverse significance all over bristled,—
Such facts he passed by, or else down the wind whistled;—
An ancient, approved, usage-worn, custom-gray,
Strictly orthodox, highly professional way!

XXI.

There were factors of life in Mark's system, whose signs
Were as clear and distinct, if but heeded, as lines
Demarkation that show 'twixt the land and the sea;
But to heed them would ultra-professional be,
And they hence were as stoutly ignored as by prude
Might be statues that border too much on the nude.

XXII.

Other surgeons came, who by the first dictum stood,
That the wounds were too deep, and too thin was the blood;
And thus, having decreed Major Landis to lack
Constitutional strength nature's efforts to back,—
Decreed facts in the line of *their* theses to lie,—
These wise judges of science condemned him to die,
And apportioned his share in days earthly as small;
And so notified Helen.

XXIII.

And then fell a pall
On her spirit. She shrank 'neath the blow, and bent down—
Bent to earth.
It had come, the designed, thornèd crown!
The dense shadows were round her; dismay held control;
And Gethsemane's passion swept over her soul.

XXIV.

Then from out of the depths she sent forth such a prayer
As comes only from hearts with great crosses to bear:

XXV.

"Thou who once hast all bidden to come unto Thee
That heart-weary and heavily earth-laden be;
Thou who once in the dust, on the way to dark death,
Hast thy cross borne in weakness and languor of breath;
O, Redeemer all-merciful, hear Thou the plaint,
And draw near to the aid, of one weary and faint!
For without Thee she cannot her heart-burden bear,
And without Thee she trembles and sinks in despair!
O, true heart of Immanuel, pierced for our sake,
This great life in the shadows do not Thou now take!
Grant Thou unto thy handmaiden, Master adored,
Her request: spare this soul, Galilee's risen Lord!"

XXVI.

Prayer, as ever, gave strength; and from under the cloud
Came grace, patience annealing, and lightened her load.
And 'twas helpful to her that she now could kneel there,
By her husband's bedside, and pour out earnest prayer
For both husband and friend.

XXVII.

She said nothing to Mark
Of the prospect the surgeons had painted so dark,

And their adverse decree; but she whispered it low
To her husband, who said:
"Still, as oft as you go
To the Throne, take his case, dear; and this will do more
Than can surgical skill, or can medical lore:
Take it thither, and well I know you'll gain the day;
For all Heaven must listen when saints like you pray."

XXVIII.

Not as lightly did Landis relinquish his hold
Upon life, as the surgeons had darkly foretold.
He tenaciously clung to the weak remnant left,
Though apparently of all defined hope bereft,—
Clung as closely, and seemed as reluctant to yield
To the conqueror pale, as on yonder red field
He was ready and willing to give himself o'er
To that conqueror, waiting 'mid battle's wild roar.

XXIX.

Was it Helen's sweet prayers that were keeping aglow
Still the embers of being, now burning so low?
Was it her interceding with merciful Heaven
In the strength of grace ever to gentleness given?
I myself think it was; and I care not to know
If far up to the Throne those prayers first had to go,
And in answer the blessing rode down on the air;
Or if, heard when thus murmured so near to Mark there,
Their strong influence wrought was direct, as it went
From one soul to the other in that silent tent.
The effect were the same, and the work were the same;
'Twere all wrought in one spirit, all gained in one Name;
And though hard be to mortals thus tracing the line
That prayer takes or prayer draws, its course still is divine.

CANTO ELEVENTH.

RECONCILEMENT.

I.

Into Landis's blood-courses entered, at length,
Some infusion of warmth; then slight stirring of strength
Brought some tinge to the cheek, some relief to the breast;
And hope whispered to faith that the crisis had passed.

II.

"God be praised, my dear fellow!" said Rolfe; "you will live!
Helen's prayers, they have saved you: to her credit give,
Not at all to the doctors, who, having predicted
Your death, will grieve sorely to be contradicted
By fate and by woman. Again do I say,
Give to her the glad glory that you live to-day!"
But ere this speech was done, slumber, heralding health,
Of Mark's senses the mastery compassed by stealth.

III.

—"Unto God give all glory, and none unto man!"
Accents chiding thus through the tent's soft silence ran.
Richard turned on his cot, and before him there stood,
In the beauty of tenderness, Sister Gertrude.
Not unwelcome, though strange, was to him that white face:
Where pain tented, such faces were ne'er out of place.

IV.

"Sister, thanks! The rebuke I in meekness receive.
But through her I must worship; through her I believe.



Richard turned on his cot, and before him there stood,
In the beauty of loveliness, Sister Gertrude.

Scant religion have I; and be not too severe,
If a saint I like you choose, although mine be here,
Yours up yonder, to pray for me at the White Throne,
Whither I have not courage to venture alone."

V.

"And this reverenced saint, of so rare, precious worth,
Whom you've chosen to bear your petitions from earth,"
Said the nun, with a mild and compassionate smile,
"Is—"

"My wife!" prompted Richard; "the one free from guile
Of all beings I know, unless I should except
Yonder friend, (o'er whose radiant face has now crept,
As you see, the soft impress of sleep,) whom my wife,
Through her prayers, has called back to the sweetness of life."

VI.

Entered Helen now, holding her child by the hand;
And at sight of the nun her bright features were spanned
With a tender alarm; but a cognizant glance
From the latter allayed her disturbed countenance.
Two fresh, fragrant bouquets, culled of blooms growing wild,
Were borne, one by the mother, and one by the child;
And the former was placed by the husband's cotside,
While, in fullness of childhood's new blossoming pride,
The young queen placed the latter by Landis's cot,—
Tributes which were each day to these invalids brought.

VII.

"I have come," said the Sister, "to render my aid
Where the work of my weak hands can useful be made.
My dear Madam, though smiles your fair, winsome face wears,
It would seem, with your wearisome burden of cares,
That your spirit, or frame, must be ready to break.
You must let me assist you. You must let me take

An old patient back under my charge, whom I see
Sleeping here your good husband beside. It will be
A relief that you surely must need."
She had said
But the truth: Helen's load on her sorely had weighed.

VIII.

Blessèd nun! Helen felt she could fall to the ground,
And the hem of her robe kiss, as Mercy's queen crowned.
And to Him who help giveth in time of heart-need
She gave thanks for this aidance, wherein she could read
A clear Providence.

IX.

Wondrous the strength of belief
In a Providence special! Care, fear, trouble, grief,
Trial, doubt, and temptation—it conquers them all!
Why, ye skeptics, ye new-lights, plot ye for its fall?
Bruise it not! break it not! cloud it not! curse it not!
To weak mortals all countless the boons it hath brought;
With fine gold hath it gilded the framework of life;
Kindly truce hath it sounded full oft in heart-strife;
It hath purpled the sunset of many a joy;
Shining worth hath it found in a deal of alloy;
In dense darkness of dread despair's night hath it shown
Unto myriad souls where appeareth the dawn.
O, ye vengeful iconoclasts, can ye not spare
This one faith-symbol standing since Eden bloomed fair?
Ye agnostics! Yourselves build on bases of sand,
Styling what ye build truth, and think that is to stand
When the things ye raze shall in oblivion be.
Ye as well supreme truth through a glass darkly see!
Ere ye ask us to heed your new ethics, show where,
Clear of cloud, clear of mist, of all earth-shadows clear,

Your bright sun of pure truth in strength radiant stands,
Giving light to the peoples and warmth to the lands!
O, empirics! Ye can not! Your sun is a cheat!
It is darkened all over with doubt; sheds no heat,
And no light, and no life!
We will wait, we will stand
'Neath the old, till truth's new sun its rays shall expand.
The old may prove a myth in the far-removed end;
But yet better a myth in whose phases there blend
Heat, and color, and brightness, and gladness, than one
Cold, and soulless, and rayless, and naked, and lone,
Standing desert and drear in the bleak universe,
Like a banned spirit, like an inherited curse!

X.

. . . Mark of Richard permission, through urgency, gained,
To be freed from his so gentle durance.
"Old friend,"
He said, holding Rolfe's hand, while his voice nearly failed
With his heart-deep emotion; "your tent has availed,
Though so small its extent, full as well to show forth
Worth chivalric, as could proudest palace of earth.
Royal guest at an emperor's court had I been,
Entertainment more princely I could not have seen.
And of you, and of Helen, [this was the first time
He had called her by that cherished name since the thyme
Had no longer grown in the parterre of his heart,]
And of this flower-girl, (pardon tears that will start,)
I shall treasure such dear recollections as will,
In all paths of existence, abide with me still,
And as comfort and help to me evermore serve,
Whatsoever the lot for me fate shall reserve."

XI.

Helen then shed an honest tear—one that fell down
On the face of her husband, and met there no frown.
And they bade him—the husband, the child, and the wife—
A united good-bye, whose tones rang through his life.

XII.

. . . A constrained happiness had been Mark's, while he lay
'Neath the care of the being who gladdened the day
And illumined the night; and emotions, subdued,
Of profound, fervent, manly, unvoiced gratitude
Filled his breast,—gratitude to his God, who had brought
To his soul this dear season, so sacred, unsought,
Of peace, rest, and heart-healing; and likewise to her—
To her, now thrice the saint in his heart's calendar—
Who, through wise and true womanhood, grandly displayed,
Had what once seemed impossible possible made,
So that safely his heart had the ordeal borne,
And had come thence unscorched, and unscarred, and untorn.
In this harborage brief, in this refuge of rest,
He had been to the depths of his whole being blessed.

XIII.

. . . Convalescence beneath the kind care of the nun
Was so swift, that her sway but brief tenure had run,
When once more on his feet Mark stood, ready again
To face danger or death on the battle's red plain.

XIV.

He now realized such reconcilement to fate
As he had not yet felt; and he opened the gate
That again led out into the pulsating world,
And the banner of life's struggle newly unfurled,
With a heart fresher, stronger, and warmer than when,
Years agone, it had bowed—ah! so low it bowed then!

He heard hum the hive human; he breathed the fresh air;
He looked out on the earth, and it seemed to him fair.

* * *

XV.

Major Landis had found, when reporting himself
At headquarters for duty, two rolls on a shelf
In the commandant's office for him; and he thought
They might be wretched cuts of the last battle fought;
Or sad caricatures of the patriot dead,
(At a cent dear, but sold for a dollar a head;)
Or low-browed, beery-looking presentments of saints,
To adorn and enliven lone barracks and tents;
Or illustrated lessons of national faith,
In blear chromos whose publishers merited death;
Or perhaps specimen phrenological charts;
Or some other of those multifarious arts
And devices whereby the poor soldiers were robbed;
And had still let them lie; when he heard himself dubbed
"Colonel Landis."

XVI.

Saluting the new commandant,
Mark corrected him, saying:
"A fine compliment
You pay me through mistake. I'm but Major thus far."

XVII.

"I beg pardon," the General said; "but a star,
Instead of either eagle or leaf, you will wear.
Two commissions have been for some time lying there,

General; and the third comes to-day. You'll report
For assignment. Young man, you have strong friends at
court."

XVIII.

"I've no friends who would interest thus take in me,"
Mark replied, "save it be our division commander, and he—"

XIX.

"He's enough; for his influence carries, of course,
That, not small, of his beautiful wife, the sweet nurse."



CANTO TWELFTH.

AU REVOIR.

I.

Richard Rolfe gained but slowly. The strong spirit, bright,
Cheerful, patient at first, chafed as hope's doubtful light,
Though yet giving no signs of extinction, grew dull;
And as well heart as hand of poor Helen was full.

II.

One calm day, when, his world-lighting labor all done,
To his rest in his gold-curtained bed sank the sun,
Helen thus said to Richard, when into his face
She had gazed long and earnestly, seeking to trace,
Though in vain, some faint token of health in his eyes,
Some dim signals of strength that hope might recognize:

III.

"O, my husband, if you would but let me suggest
What to do with this body of yours, which no rest
And no healing obtains in this wearisome camp,
Where the reveille drum and the sentinel's tramp
Are the sounds that incessantly fall on your ear,
With the clangor and terrors of war ever near;
If you will but deliver yourself unto me,
And with this wasted frame give me all liberty,
I will take it up gently, and bear it away,
To a Southland—not ours, but far yonder, where lay
The world's middle-age glories when chivalry thrived,
Whose true spirit in you has so nobly survived.

IV.

"We will go to the fair land of Provence, where once
I was ready my own native land to renounce
For the peace which that charmed realm presented; and there
I will gather for you the old chronicles rare,
And the tales of romance that in folk-legends live;
And all these into song for my husband I'll weave:
Then I'll sing them to him, lying by the warm sea;
And I'll win his applause, which will dear be to me.

V.

The ripe grapes we will pluck where they burden the vine;
And your blood we will warm with rich, redolent wine,
Such as that which in Cana a God-guest once made,
And baptized with his blessing. The olive trees' shade
Shall refresh us; their fruit, and the fig, and the date,
Your life-currents shall quicken and invigorate.

VI.

"And thus lingering there, while the days past us run,
Fanned by airs that blow softly from lands of the sun,
And not counting the hours nor the weeks that go by,
Time begin but to reckon when gleams in your eye
Light of health and of strength. Until then we'll forget
That earth aught hath o'er which care to borrow or fret.
We will sit and watch sunsets and dawns come and go,
And a dream-life that no interruption shall know
We will live, with no one save ourselves and our child
To regard.

VII.

"And when Heaven once more shall have smiled
On my husband, my Richard of lionlike heart,
And his arm given strength, then again his old part



He said, "I will go
To the earth's farthest bounds, if it be but with you."

And old place in the conflict of life he shall take,
And come back where the world is alive and awake.
For my lion-heart should not a love captive pine
While his arm could swing weapon in battle's drawn line.
. . . What response has my husband to this wifely plan?
Will he yield himself up? Will he go?"

VIII.

. . . Pale and wan,
Lying there, he had listened to her, while a light,
Such as love ever keeps, e'en in death's gloaming, bright,
Reillumined his eyes, and he said:
"I will go
To the earth's farthest bounds, if it be but with you.
Take me unto you; carry me whither you will:
Only send me not from you; remain with me still;
Still be near me, and do with me what shall seem best;
I but ask you to give me your presence, and rest."

* * * *

IX.

Bon voyage! Lightly blow o'er the main, swelling gales!
Gently rock, ocean billows, the ship, as it sails
From the shore where the lusty young child of the Now
Stands with eyes looking Westward and star-adorned brow,
To the strand where sits dreaming the gray-bearded Then,
Looking Eastward for days that come never again.
Breath of balm from all spice-isles that dot the far seas
O'er the deck be soft wafted on wings of each breeze!

X.

Bon retour! May the gentle skies hovering o'er
These heart-worn *voyageurs*, on yon far, storied shore,
Break with never a storm that shall damage or scath,
Till, heart-freshened, they start on their glad homeward path;
And then back to the land that lies fair in the West
May they come bearing profit-sheaves—come, spirit-blest!



PART THIRD

FRUITION

CANTO FIRST.

PEACE.

I.

Back from roaring of cannon and rolling of drum,
To his home on the prairie Mark Landis had come;
And he stood at his gate, and gazed over his farm,
And contrasted its calm with war's ceaseless alarm.
He saw each growing thing springing forth as of old;
Saw the wheat turning swiftly from green into gold;
Saw the corn in ranks marshaled as grandly as men,
Glad to be of such ranks in command once again;
Smelt the scent of the sweet prairie hay, newly mown,
From the field by the sweating, mild-eyed oxen drawn;
Saw in pasture the kine, in whose lowing he heard
Hymnal praise of blest creatures, with gratitude stirred;
Saw all nature instinct with life, thrift, and increase;
And then looked up to Heaven and thanked God for peace.

II.

Let the muse turn aside from the thread of the tale,
For a moment on peace and its profits to dwell.
Of the glories of war bards unnumbered have sung,
And their strains through each vale of our loved land have rung;
While divines vie with orators, fiery-browed Mars
In renown to keep foremost among gods and stars.
Small inducement this leaves for him who of sweet peace
Would fain sing, 'gainst the tide of the people's caprice.

III.

Ye who cherish that true love of country which springs
From firm faith in a future that righteousness brings—
In a future that must in its spirit lift up
The Republic, and make it a beacon of hope
To the lands in autocracy's darkness that sit,
And of liberty see but the dull silhouette,—
To your patriot hearts I make earnest appeal
In behalf of a cause which of right claims your zeal.

IV.

If refinement the outlay repay spent to gain
Its effulgent effect on humanity's brain;
If prosperity yield such rewards as to give
Recompense for the struggle it costs to achieve;
If domestic security bring a return
Justifying all efforts this blessing to earn:
If possessions like these make communities great,
Let us plant them with care in the soil of the state,
And not let them be choked with vile demagogue-weeds,
Nor with thistles upsprung from war's tempest-blown seeds.

V.

Would you see your great ships in pride ploughing the main,
To earth's marts afar bearing your goods or your grain?
Would you still keep the factory turning the wheel,
With its populous hive, for the land working weal?
Would you keep in the forges the fires still aglow,
Where the work of a myriad Vulcans they do?
Would you speed the plow bringing to blossom the fields,
Whose soil fertile grain golden with magic strength yields?—
Then for peace be your words, fellow-countrymen mine,
And give efforts and prayers for its blessings benign.

VI.

And, O, servant elect of the mild Prince of Peace,
Of ensanguined haranguings grant us a surcease!
Mingle not with the tidings in Galilee told
The red talk of the foray; the ears of your fold
Feed no longer with tales of the barracks; but strike,
Let me plead with you, some higher key—something like
That the Master struck when his entrancing notes thrilled
Human hearts with new love and their wild tumults stilled.
Tell again, and again, and again, the old tale
Of the cross and the crown—*that* will never grow stale;
But relieve us from preachments that breed in the heart
Passions forming of Christliness never a part!

VII.

. . . How sweet once more was work! Of the plow Mark
grasped hold,
As of hands of some friend of the dear days of old;
And the fork, and the rake, and the hoe, and the spade,
Charm magnetic had when his hands on them were laid.
And he breathed the fresh breath of his oxen and cows,
And the perfume of health of his stacks and his mows;
And his frame felt new vigor in every part,
While his blood sent new strength to his swift throbbing heart.

VIII.

True, his colts and his calves had away from him grown,
As life's duties severe they had entered upon;
And these old pets surveyed him with grave, mature eyes,
Which said: "Friend, the fond past far behind us now lies;
And caresses of yesterday's golden-eyed morn
Have no place in to-day's actualities stern."
Old acquaintanceships had to be formed thus anew,
(Something with human creatures we've often to do;)

But new pets came to take places left by the old,
And these always were waiting in every fold.

IX.

Of his bay beauties, one had been under him shot,
When a ball scarred his brow, in the last battle fought,
And the other with honor retired on full pay,
For brave services rendered in love's tender day.

X.

Strength electric from handling his horses he drew,
A constituent part of their daily life grew,
And the sentiment from their companionship caught
With which Israel's prophets' sublime strains are fraught,
That the horse, as a creature, is so near divine
As to miss but by language the reasoning line.

XI.

His hands deeply he thrust into Nature's great breast,
And therefrom drew the secrets the dame closely pressed;
And he learned what a prodigal mother she was
To him when he but half way regarded her laws;
Learned that whether the harvest fields laugh or they weep,
Depends greatly on faith that with Nature we keep;
Learned that earth grows faint, hungry, and famished, like men,
And, her hunger appeased, glows with vigor again;
Learned that earth becomes easily jealous; craves care,
Such as woman craves; pouts if she has not her share;
But that when such fond care is upon her bestowed,
She a synonym is of supreme gratitude,
And with more than the measure we mete out to her
Yields she when we the springs of her gratitude stir.

* * * *

XII.

Through life's variant trials of head and of heart
As our progress we make, of our time no small part
Is devoted to burying dreams that are dead,
Which, alive, on the heart's strongest tissues were fed ;
And we lay them away in the earth's peaceful breast,
Where, 'neath daisies we've tenderly planted, they rest.

XIII.

Mark had buried the dreams of his youth in the soil
Of the farm that had blossomed beneath his hard toil;
And he stood in reality's sunshine, awake
To all influences that life practical make.
Thus existence subjective to him ceased to be,
And objective became to a tensive degree ;
While, a tenant content of the present, he paid
Unto Cæsar the just tribute due him, and made
All things round him conform to his real-life code ;
So no ghosts of dead days round his premises strode.

XIV.

Among other dreams he had thus sepultured, lay
That of art. From the soul dulling moil of to-day
The ideals of his yesterdays tremblingly shrank,
And, crushed under the heels of utility, sank.
Thus the echoes that through all the years had been borne
Of the old Doctor's dictum in life's clouded morn—
Echoes sacred to Mark since that gray, revered head
On the fresh field of fight had lain low with the dead—
These, together with his strangely forced quest for pelf,
Let his once so loved palette still mould on the shelf.
He seemed grimly determined to finish the task
Broken off by the war—seemed resolved not to bask

In the light of the once so loved Beautiful, till
He had brought all his efforts and strength to fulfill
What now shaped itself into a duty; and so
Idly ran on the years, while the ebb and the flow
Of life's tide no event signalized which betrayed
That for him human happenings one issue made
Higher than those they make for the dull-witted clod
Whose thoughts spring in and mingle with his native sod.

XV.

This the phase Mark's course showed in the word's daily strife.
Was it all that was left of his once yearning life?
Were there no cords remaining, which, struck tenderly,
Would resound with the music that once used to be?
If there were, in abeyance so closely they lay,
That they never were heard in the blare of the day.

XVI.

If, perchance, in the soft hush of night, there were strains
Ringing through his heart's halls, whose rekindling refrains
Thrilled his being, and for a duration brief warmed
Into life the sweet influences that once formed
The aurora of tenderer seasons, occult were they kept,
And in whisperings low through his soul-chambers swept,
Fleeing swiftly when showed the first flush of the dawn,
To earth's interests beckoning him sternly on.

CANTO SECOND.

POLITICS.

I.

There was one trait in Mark, truth compels me to say,
Which was not at all in the American way,
And betrayed a sad lack of the patriot fire
Which within the Columbian breast feeds desire
For political honor and profit. With youth,
And with spirit, and *prestige*, and pride, in good sooth
It was strange that he no *cacoethes* should have
For disporting upon the political wave.
Though endowed not, like Rolfe, with the qualities true
To win over *hoi polloi*, in some points of view
He attracted the favor of leaders who "stood
On the battlements guarding the commonwealth's good,"
(Which means keeping unbroken one's own party lines,
And defeating the opposite party's designs.)
He was young, he had fought for his country, and bled,
And had no party record which over his head
Could be brandished in case of the use of his name
As a torch to light others to partisan fame.

II.

A political canvass was just taking form,
And the campaigning glow was beginning to warm
The old veterans who at the office crib fed,
And to party devoted hands, lungs, heart, and head.

III.

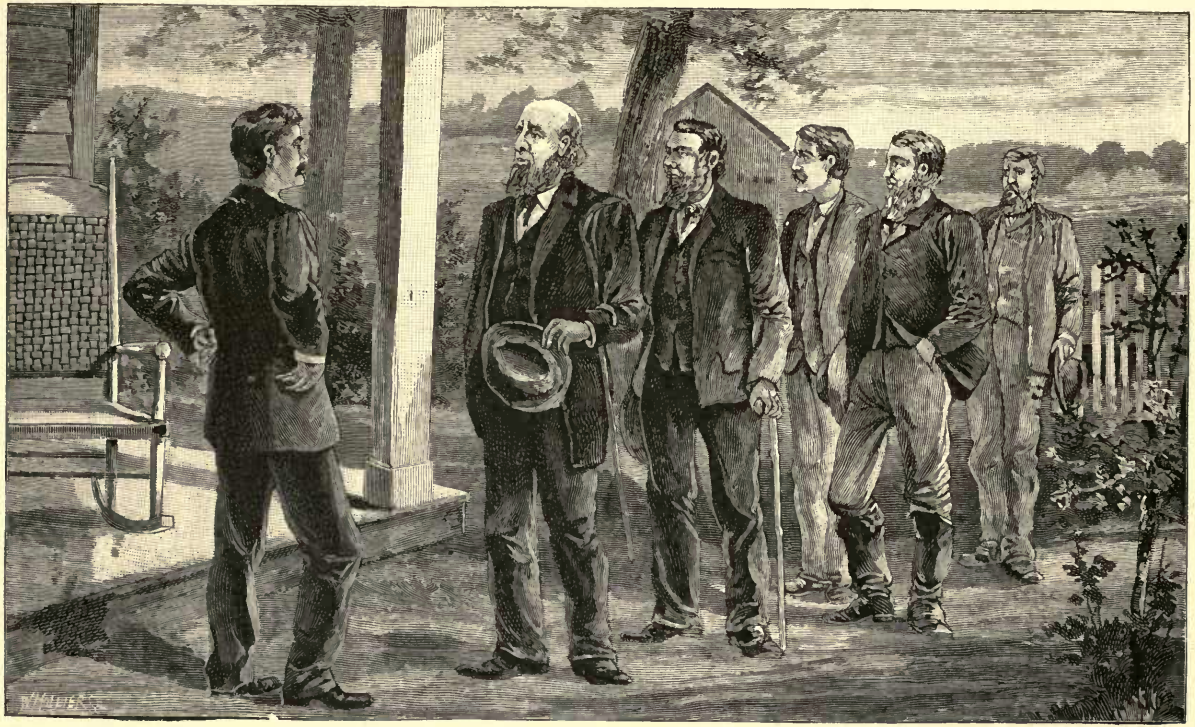
As Mark sat on his porch, on a dull afternoon,
While the drowsy air seemed with the warblers in tune,
That were lazily singing their songs in the boughs
Of the trees he had planted in life's pregnant pause,
A committee presented themselves at the farm,
In such force as to bring to his breast some alarm,
Were it not for the fact that no weapons they bore,
Save their walking sticks, and that each face a smile wore.
. . . He arose to receive them, with deference due,
Having no premonition of what was in view.

IV.

The committee were chosen with care from among
The choice spirits the party contained. Part were young,
With the sap of life's spring flowing fresh through their veins;
Part were old, with experience's furrows and stains
On their weather-worn features and forms; but each one
Was a true representative of the *haut ton*
Of the party in Mark's bailiwick ; and the whole,
When assembled together, accordant in soul,
And in purpose and action, presented a front
Of political influence he was not wont
To encounter in his retired sphere.

V.

Leading on
This legation so truly imposing, was one,
Mellow-ripe as to years, full of stomach, with eyes
Round and owl-like, which looked preterhumanly wise,
As across the broad bridge of a huge, pulpy nose
They glanced out o'er the public, for whose good to pose
Was the life-occupation of this man of note,
Whose red face, heavy chin, spacious cheek, and craned throat



General, say! The boys hev ben thinkin', right smart,
That yer name to our deestrick would give a fresh start.

Showed capacity ample to jealously guard
The dear people's preserves—for a proper reward.

VI.

The committee had chosen this man as their chairman,
Because he stood high as a partisan "square" man;
The "straight ticket" voting; at polls watching ever;
In heat or cold, early or late, tiring never;
The old party loving, year in and year out;
Never harboring scruple; o'ercast by no doubt;
Never known in all years to be absent from caucus;
Predicting great triumphs, like salty old Glaucus.
. . . This Chairman the following speech made to Landis,
Which "from our reporter's notes" faithfully penned is:

VII.

"General, say! The boys hev ben thinkin', right smart,
That yer name to our deestrick would give a fresh start,
Which it needs. We're agoin' to run ye fur office!
We'll put ye through on yer war record. The trophies
Of battle we'll show, an' yer scars. That thar
On the side o' yer face, nigh yer temple, ye w'ar—
That's as good as a dozen mass meetin's fur us:
Fur they'll have ter trot out a loud patriot cuss
On the oppersite side to trump *that* kind o' keerd;
But they've got nary one of which we are afeerd.
We'll bring out the old flag, with a whoop, an' a shout,
An' a rush, that can't fail ter completely clean out
Our opponents, an' so, don't ye see, git the whole
Of the deestrick's fat offices in our control.
We perpose to start low in the scale: here's a call
Fur the State legislatur to run this next fall.

This is on'y the fust—the beginnin', my friend;
An' thar's no knowin' whar, sir, an' when it'll end.
Ef ye watch sharp yer corners, be keerful, an' don't
Make no blunders nur balks, keep yerself to the front,
Vote accordin' to corkis, stand up to the rack,
An' don't git nary princerpul-cricks in yer back,
Why, Mark, we'll make a man o' ye! On'y be straight,
An' we'll carry ye through, ef Old Knick's at the gate!"

VIII.

Landis listened with patient respect, until through
Was the Chairman with his terse and cogent review
Of political manhood's essentials; then said:
"Friends and neighbors, I heartily thank you. I've read
The request, very flattering, here made of me,
That I stand as your candidate; yet, while must be
Ever dear to my heart the kind favor of friends,
I must say to you frankly, that I have no ends
Such as would be subserved by accepting this call,
And must therefore decline, again thanking you all.
I regret, Mr. Chairman, that I cannot grant
Your desire; but, sincerely, no office I want."

IX.

—"*What's that?*" bolted the Chairman, when Landis had paused,
Whose last words poignant pain to his spirit had caused;
"Won't run? Don't want no office? Why, is the man mad?
Better 'pinion o' you, neighbor Mark, had I had!"

X.

The committee *en masse* rose, and one moment gazed
At the General, shocked, pained, disgusted, amazed;
And, while sadly bewildered, aghast standing there,
—The truth naked I tell—each particular hair

Of each dumb-struck committeeman stood stiff and hard,
Like—like quills—like——
O, Avon's and Nature's great bard!
From thy tomb in old Stratford come forth, and give me,
What my muse hath denied me, a new simile,
To set forth the strange compound of wonderment, pain,
Fond regret, sorrow, sympathy, scorn, and disdain,
Friendly chiding and bitter contemning, all blent
And commingled in one look supreme and intent,
In our average national visage discerned,
Turned upon a man who ne'er for office hath yearned!

XI.

But, "eternal sprang hope" in that old Chairman's breast;
And he could not believe that a life with such zest
Should be lost to the party. He rallied again,
And appealed to Mark Landis in this fervent strain,
In which utilitarian ethics combined
With political sense of the earthiest kind:

XII.

"Take a feller's advice in the party grown gray;
Who has seen reppertations rise up an' decay,
Like the mushrat bogs dottin' our sloughs; seen upstarts
Shoot forth, run their short race, an' fade out, like spring warts
On these tough hands o'mine! Hear an old 'un who's seen
Polliwog politicians their pools wiggle in
Fur a few sunny days, an' then dry up in mud!
Heed a chap who has chawed the perlitical cud!
Don't ye let this smart chance yer young fingers slip through—
This prime hour to make hay while the sun shines fur you!
'Twon't shine allers, my boy, as it's shinin' terday:
Popperlarity's dark ekernoctial yer way

May sweep past; then ye're down, 'way down, flat on yer back;
An' in pollertics, mind, thar's no gainin' los' track.
While the yumur the changeable public is on,
To pay you up in full for yer sojer-work done,
Take all you can git clamps on, an' stow it away,
'Ginst what comes to the best on us—some rainy day.
Reckin twic't! This refushal with which ye have met us
Take back! Why, man, *we'll send ye ter Congress, 'f ye'll let us!*"

XIII.

And the Chairman paused, stood off at arm's length, and bent
On Mark Landis a look most impressive, which went—
Or, at least, was intended to go—to his soul;
Such a look as meant this, if my pen can control
Words sufficient to give it a frame: That to him—
To him, Landis—was offered what not cherubim,
Seraphim, nor archangel, can e'er overpraise;
What no bard of earth truly can sing in his lays;
A supreme, rare felicity, only bestowed
On the brave, and the pure, and the great, and the good;—
That to him had been proffered, in that prize held forth,
Something far beyond gold thrice refined in its worth;
Fruitage such as no islands of tropic seas yield;
Nectar never for gods on Olympus distilled.

XIV.

To the true politician, the popular branch
Of our Congress is Heaven; and he who is staunch,
"Square", and faithful to party, may cherish the hope
Thither some golden day to be vote-wafted up.
All above this position is but degree glory,—
All are angels there, sitting in Heaven's first story.

XV.

But the General was so far lost to all sense
Of the Chairman's outline of supreme opulence,
That he most sacrilegiously this to him spoke,
Which well nigh his susceptible, tender heart broke:

XVI.

"Mr. Chairman, I deem it more honor to till
My farm here, if I shall till it well, than to fill
The position of Congressman, even. There lies
In the gift of the people no office I prize;
And as long as calm reason shall sit on her throne,
Just so long will Mark Landis his soul call his own.
Should I e'er see the time, 'neath the smiling of fate,
When a man can take office for good of the state,
And not pledged to sink honor and soul in the dust,
I should proud be to hold a position of trust;
But ere that time shall come, Mr. Chairman, your head
And mine will in their last and long rest have been laid.
I doubt not that 'twill come in the slow rolling years,
But our tales will be told ere its day-star appears.

XVII.

"And again: bear in mind, 'twas no bargain I made,
No mean, cool, calculating, sharp patriot-trade,
Entered into between Government and myself,
Whereby I, for political vantage and pelf,
Promise made to defend it. No! If I was leal
To the nation protecting my life and my weal,
It were venal to lay any claim to reward
For but doing my duty by drawing my sword.
Should I ever bring down my own manhood so low
As my wounds to the public to set up for show,

Like the mendicant cripples who sit on the street
And from all passers-by coppers meekly entreat,
I were then subject fit for my country's contempt,
Not her trust. Whosoe'er would a citizen tempt
To so rank an abasement of manhood, deserves
To be crushed by the mean party spirit he serves;
And no man I esteem to be longer my friend
Who would hold out to me so ignoble an end!"

XVIII.

This the theme set at rest, most effectually,
And thenceforth Mark from like importunings was free;
For a man holding such sentiments is the one,
Of all mortal men under enlightenment's sun,
Whom professional patriots least can abide.
Thus, while, flushed with his fame, Mark was still in the tide
Of world-favor, he in the political zone
Was accorded a most "severe letting alone."

CANTO THIRD.

OPINION.

I.

As the months and the seasons trooped by, Landis showed
Not a sign of relaxing the efforts bestowed
On his farm work—such efforts as all energies
Of his nature enlisted. By no slow degrees
His soft hands became hard, rough, and horny again,
And his fine features bronzed; and the deep, honest stain
Of farm life the devotion bespoke that he gave
To this mistress, which people said made him its slave.
—"Far from that! 'Twas his bride, and he loved it, as wife
Can be loved who makes sweet the experience bitter of life.
It was all the bride now he dreamed ever to wed."
This was to an inquisitive neighbor once said.

II.

But the dreams of his neighboring feminine friends
Did not tally at all with his own. They had ends
And planned schemes for him, which were all sadly frustrated
By his purpose declared of remaining unmated.

III.

Over him had the Sewing Society watched,
Like a sitting hen over her chickens unhatched.
At one afternoon's full-quorumed heathen-work bee,
Mark was sandwiched between the poor pagans and tea:

Neatly then was our farmer transfixed on a spit,
Shifted over and done to a turn, and made fit
For a meal for those cannibals for whose dear sake
These sweet saints wrought in spirit of martyr at stake.

IV.

That not wholly adverse were the comments put forth
On our hero and friend by these workers of worth,
Our report clearly shows. We premise at the start,
That a score or more took in the *plauderei* part;
And we do not each speech by itself designate,
But leave all unassorted, as in the debate,—
Negative with affirmative mingling, in maze
Which a well ruled debating school's chairman would craze.

V.

Thus began the symposium :

" Horrid the shame,
That a young man like him, with a nobly earned name,
And a very fair fortune, should *think* [thus accenting
This word in true feminine style] of absenting
Himself from our pleasant society here,
And affect to play hermit!"

VI.

"And yet he's a dear,
Just *delightful* society man, if one only
Could draw him away from his solitude lonely."

VII.

" And what *do* you suppose the true reason can be
For his reticence strange, and his close privacy?"

VIII.

" Disappointment in love, they say; though he'd appear
To be too strong of will to let *that* interfere
With his normal digestion."

IX.

"With whom is it said
He was smitten so seriously?"

"One who is dead,
I believe, though her name I can't just now recall."

X.

"Dead loves linger not long. Autumn leaves do not fall
Many times on their graves.

"*And*, the General seems
To be too much engrossed in his work to nurse dreams
Of the dead."

XI.

"Those who claim to be better informed
Than the balance, insist that his heart never warmed
Save to one, and that she walks the living among,
Not the dead; to which love he has e'er closely clung:
In a word, that for her he is grieving who was
Helen Graves."

XII.

"That is all a mistake!"

"Why?"

"Because
She'd have had him twice over, had he ever asked
For her hand."

XIII.

"Then her feelings adroitly she masked;
For she seemed to be madly in love, all the while,
With Dick Rolfe."

XIV.

"O, well, she was a flirt! In a wile
Of her own setting she was most handsomely caught;
And 'twas good enough for her: the minx!"

"But she got
A good husband, withal."

"Why, yes; too good for her,
By one half. One can scarcely with patience refer
To her long stay abroad, under plea that his health
Makes it requisite. Bah! She is wasting his wealth,
Just to gratify whims of her own."

"That's the truth;
Well, she always *was* queer, from her earliest youth."

XV.

"Have you talked with our pastor of Landis?"

XVI.

"To-day
We were speaking of him in a casual way.
'A free giver the General is,' Pastor says;
'But strange notions he nurses, and singular ways;
And I fear he's not orthodox.'"

XVII.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Dear!"

"My!"

XVIII.

"And wherein seems his heterodoxy to lie?
I am sure that he used to be sound as a bell."

XIX.

"There's the trouble! 'Tis hard, says our pastor, to tell
What his actual sentiments are."

XX.

"Then the man
Has been judged without hearing. To start thus a ban
From sheer negative premises based on mistrust,
With no positive knowledge, is grossly unjust.



"The Idea!"

"Absurd!"

"He's a bear!"

Though to our catechetical pastor obscure
His theology be, clean his life is, and pure;
And his sweet, earnest faith in the Lord of the years,
And His word and their promise, too patent appears,
To permit me to doubt that when Yonder is called
The long roster, the pastor will find him enrolled."

XXI.

Thus the dissonant chatter ran on.
"By the way,
You know what people have been accustomed to say
Of the General's health. There's no doubt he has been
Quite consumptive. But our doctor says discipline,
Regimen, open air exercise, wholesome food,
And strong will, have the malady fairly subdued;
So that *that* plea no longer forms any excuse
For his not marrying."
"'Tis a sinful abuse
Of his gifts."
"*The idea!*"
"*Absurd!*"
"*He's a bear!*"

XXII.

"No! You wrong him most deeply. Ungracious nowhere,
And a gentleman always, is he, and *so* true!"
Said an elderly lady, who had hitherto
In this gentle word-scrimmage had nothing to say.
She instinctively glanced at a locket that lay
On her breast, which a miniature picture enclosed:
This a young soldier's bright, handsome features disclosed.
To one near her who sat in low tones she explained,
While a tear, from her eye dropped, the locket's face stained:

XXIII.

"My boy loved him and cleaved to him, as to a brother,
And died at his side."
'Twas the Corporal's mother.

CANTO FOURTH.

SURCEASE.

I.

By the Mediterranean's shore, hid away
From the penetrant eye of the world, dreaming lay
A quaint hamlet. The busy, tumultuous tide
Of earth's traffic and travel its precincts left wide.
Thither came not, incisive, with hum and with buzz,
(Which the soul would have tried of the good man of Uz,)
Human bees, wasps, and insects of kindred antennæ,
Styled tourists; nor thither, to seek the brisk penny,
Came traveler commercial.
So close was the spot,
And so still, that the noisy old sea half forgot
His loud talk when he reached its calm shore through the bay,
Where the eld-fashioned fishing smacks lazily lay.
As with delicate, exquisite mantle of lace,
In far looms woven daintily, deftly, the face
Of the landscape with vapor translucent was veiled;
And one might deem the skirts of the angels had trailed
Along hills that lay fair in the soft southern sun,
And nursed fondly the dream of a day that was done.

II.

This far nook of the world sought two mortals oppressed;
Hither came they to find, what both sore needed, rest.
For I trow, Helen Rolfe, that not solely for him
By whose couch you had watched till o'er brain as o'er limb

Languors stealthily crept, had you sought this retreat;
But that you craved as well a relief from the heat,
And the dust, and the wearing, and anguish, and tears,
Which thus far had been yours in your womanhood's years.

III.

A Norse legend in Frithiof's Saga lays down
This stern rule for the hero who fights for renown:
"Gain to viking is wound, and it doth him adorn,
When on forehead or breast the scar is to be worn.
Let it bleed; bind it not until daylight be done,
Wouldst thou merit 'mong vikings to be counted one."*
It is e'er deemed an honor, in all kinds of war,
Not to faint while the battle is raging. The scar
That most proudly adorns hero's brow, cheek, or breast
Is the one where the weapon most deeply has pressed.
'Tis the wound that bled longest, that latest was bound,
Which will ne'er fail to be with the most glory crowned.

IV.

This is true in life's warfare.
To Helen Rolfe's heart
There had come weary moments when blood-drops would start
From her wounds, and when spirit and flesh were both weak.
At such times she had longed some safe shelter to seek,
Where in peace she might lie while the storm raged without,
And hear naught of the fighting, or triumph, or rout.
She had sometimes yearned strongly once more to go back
To that home on the prairie, away from war's track,
To that fond parent breast, to that true heart which beat
But for her; and the olden, loved hearth were retreat

*See Title-Page.

To her soul the most grateful. But ever then came
The implacable Conscience the judge, and cried: "Shame!
In the front, in the heat of the battle, wouldst shrink?
Better now and here into oblivion sink!"

V.

Yet with honor at length she had left the hard field,
To retire till her woundings and bruisings were healed.
And would healing come when came the quiet she sought?
To this question she scarcely had vouchsafed a thought.
She had hoped; she had trusted; she still would hope, trust;
But, if need be, her way could yet lie through the dust.

VI.

. . . Richard Rolfe made a hard fight for life. Hope was strong;
Life was dear; and his system stood stoutly and long,
The importunate summons resisting, which seemed
Issued out of Death's court.
One malignant light gleamed
Against hope. At the portal of breath the ball lay,
Like a panther beside and assured of its prey—
This reminder grim of his last day on the field,
Where his brightly ambitious career had been sealed.
All things else now conspired death's design to defeat;
All things else stood for life—but this last foe to meet.
The entire separation from scenes that might tend
To distraction of mind, availed vast aid to lend
In the struggle. The quiet, the climate, the air,
And, above and beyond all, the sweet, tender care
Of the gentle, and faithful, and vigilant wife,
Guarding well all the avenues leading to life;
Reinforcing with prayer all the efforts of breath;
Standing sentry against each approach of pale Death;—

These were elements ranging themselves on hope's side,
While the panther, close crouching, their might still defied.

* * * *

VII.

The weeks wore into months, and the months into years;
And still hovered life there, amid doubts, hopes, and fears.
One, three, five years passed by; and still there Richard lay,
Quiet, trustful, submissive, beneath Helen's sway;
Asking not to return to his own native land;
Asking only for rest, and the presence that spanned
All the radiant sky of his gently watched life—
His untiring, all-tender, all-dutiful wife;
Her sweet duplicate, too—hope's illumed morning star,
The first-born child of spring, the fair blossom of war,
The fulfilled prophecy of contentment and rest,
That had been (for dear Madame Marsile) named Celeste.

VIII.

Let it not be thought that, in this far-away clime,
Helen lacked for the means of diverting the time;
She accustomed herself to sketch scenes from her door;
And sometimes she reached farther in nature's great store,
And among the near hills wandered, bringing back thence
New enchantments for Rolfe, whose delight was intense,
And not flattery-feigned; for his love-lighted eyes,
In confirming his lips, spoke his o'erpleased surprise,
And it grew to be one of the joys of her days,
From him thus to wring ever fresh springing eye-praise,
And these silent encomiums strove hard to gain.
For, though guileful at seasons, the eyes cannot feign

Overlong, like the voice, and a miracle-lie
With each moment renew, to keep faith in supply.

IX.

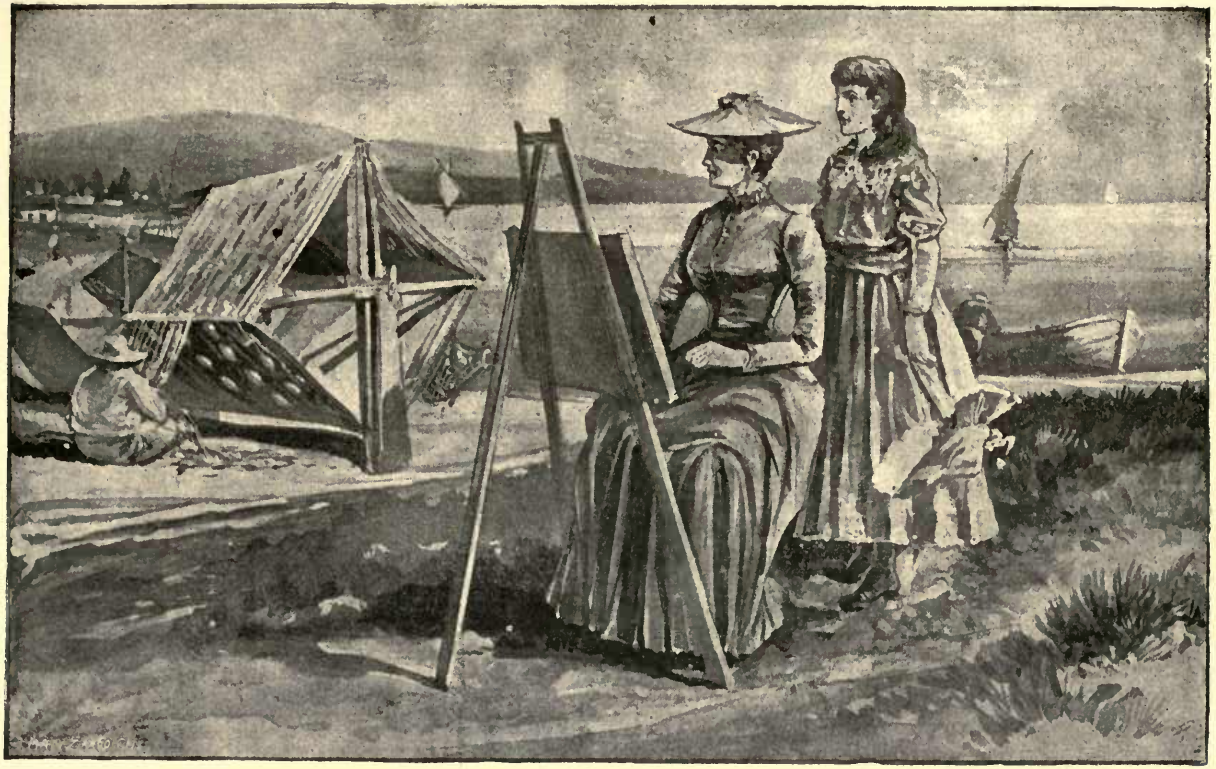
These exertions, prolonged, at length caused her to feel
Something tinged as with pride in her augmenting skill
In the use of the crayon; which by degrees served
To incite her to higher attempts, and her striving arm nerved,
And enabled her nature's expressions to catch,
Giving birth to desire that she might lift the latch
Into art's antechamber that opens. Ere long,
Then, her confidence growing sufficiently strong,
She aspired upon canvas the sketches to place,
Which it filled up the years of seclusion to trace.

X.

The world truly was limited she had to please,
And by no means a captious one, ready to freeze
With its icy neglect, shame with praise insincere,
Blast with preconceived frown, sting with connoisseur sneer,
Or with critic-claws savage disfigure and tear
The first children her efforts in travail should bear.
The chief censor was Richard, and he the most stern;
Next came large-eyed Celeste, with her critical turn;
And to supplement them, something over a score
Of shy, eye-straining peasants, who passed by her door,
Bringing wine, grapes, and fruits of the season to sell,
And the news of their little earth-circuit to tell:
And these made up the whole of mankind's mighty heart,
Which she sought to touch by her exertions in art.

XI.

—With a trifling exception or two.
There was one
Whose severity was not a myth, and whose frown



And enabled her nature's expressions to catch,
Giving birth to desire that she might lift the latch
Into art's antechamber that opens.

Rested often on efforts the rest had declared
Without flaw; and that one was herself. Roughly fared
Any fault or defect that in aught she had done
She should find.
In the struggle-lined years that were gone,
In the multiplied trials her young life had seen,
Helen ever her own judge severest had been;
And this still was the case.

XII.

But again: was there not,
Running through these strong, out-reaching efforts, a thought,
A desire, or a dream, to do something that might,
At some time, meet an eye whose illuminant light
From her life's joys or woes had been shut out for aye?—
Something which, viewed by one, might induce him to say:
"She wrought out of the shadows some things to grace earth;
She brought out of the trial some strength that had worth"?
Let the years solve the question; but if this had been
An incentive to her in her self-discipline,
When she struggled in art as she struggled in life,
No less surely it made her a true, helpful wife.

XIII.

And in art not alone Helen interest took.
She oft mingled among the Provence peasant-folk,
Gleaning legends in their softened tongue that still lived,
And their soul into lays for her husband's ear weaved,
Which with aid of the little Celeste's voice were sung;
And what need to say, rapt on these ballads he hung?
There were songs of all days in the Middle Age times
Handed down in the measures of these Romance rhymes.
The strains mainly but sounded such slumbering themes
As the world has forgot since it gave o'er its dreams:

The charmed tales of Crusaders at times telling o'er;
Again singing of Spain's prolonged strife with the Moor;
Anon chaunting of days when the Frank ruled the age,
And lined all in bright gold Europe's historied page.

XIV.

Richard cleaved to one ballad that Helen thus sang,
Wherein tender romance of old chivalry rang,
While it served more than others to soothe his own breast;
And thus ran, by her rendered,

The Maiden's Love-Quest.

I.

Of true love hear, that was tried of yore:
There lived a knight, in the olden summers;
A strong, sure blade at his side he wore;
In jousts stood ever against all comers.

II.

He loved a maiden; she loved him well;
He rode to Palestine 'gainst the Paynim.
Came word a captive the brave knight fell;
Fain the maid would know if the foe had slain him.

III.

She donned the guise of a troubadour;
From home and friends she with brave heart parted;
Through wearying leagues lay her sad love-tour,
While she tidings sought of her faithful-hearted.

IV.

She reached the land of the dear Lord's birth;
She neared the field where the hosts were lying;
With a fever-thirst she had sunk to earth;
Her strength fled fast, and she seemèd dying.

V.

Came charging by, with exultant cries,
A troop of riders, with fierce arms mounted;

She durst not look, and she veiled her eyes;
She crossed herself, and her beads she counted.

VI.

She laid her face on the parchéd sand;
She breathed one prayer to the Mother Mary.
"O, let some knight, if I in this land
Must die, my heart to my own land carry!"

VII.

Her thirst grew great; in her agony
She craved the spears of the rushing foemen.
These words then thrilled her: "O, not for thee
The lances true of my trusty yoemen!

VIII.

"Our Lady Mary hath heard thy prayer;
Thy heart, home-faring, shall be my burden;
But next mine own it shall rest when there:
Our bridal-bells shall thy brave faith guerdon."

XV.

Between tending her patient, and culling these lays,
Whose quaint strains served to soothe and to sweeten his days,
The so careful instruction bestowed on her child,
And her studies in art, the time Helen beguiled,
And filled up to completeness; and never a day
Since her head the first night on Provence pillows lay
Had a single hour heavily hung on her hands,
Had she felt at all irksome her close exile-bands.

XVI.

In the simple, hard lives by the fishermen led,
In the battles they fought with the billows for bread,
In their sorrows and joys, Helen could not have failed
To take interest. Frequently was she regaled

With the rhythm of songs of the sea, and the burdens
Of ballads that told of the struggle-earned guerdons
These toilers won there on the strand and the wave,
These toilers so hardy, and patient, and brave.
Among such strains was rarely heard one that was not
With devotion the truest and tenderest fraught,
Which conduced to build up this rude folk in their faith.
Such a one was the lay of

The Fisherman's Wraith.

I.

O, say, hast thou heard of the fisherman's ghost?
If not, sit by my side,
And, while out flows the tide,
I'll sing thee a song of a barque that was lost—

II.

That was lost in the years that shall never return,
When the fisherman's brow
Was not clouded, as now,
With care clinging to lives burdened, pinched and forlorn.

III.

In those years vowed a fisher an impious vow,—
Vowed by no saint adored,
But by Judas abhorred,—
To make draught with his net fisher never yet saw.

IV.

Not a shade of a cloud heaven's azure vault veiled,
As his boat sailed away
O'er the breast of the bay,
While with pride overweening his false bosom swelled.

V.

And along the shore drifting, immense was the draught
As his nets in he hauled;
Then on Judas he called,
Praising him while a blasphemous beaker he quaffed:

VI.

"Good Iscariot, I bless thee!" exultant he cried,
As his shallop he veered,
And his course homeward steered
For his cot by the bay where the sea's breakers died.

VII.

Still no cloud in the sky; but the fisher, O, where
Was his barque and its freight?
Long, ah! long did they wait
By his hearth his return, till hope died in despair.

VIII.

But when soft lay the moon on the bosom of night,
Traversed slowly the ghost
Of the fisherman lost
Wonted paths on the strand of the surge-singing bight.

IX.

And the goodwives they say that when winds wildly blow,
If they cross the weird path
Of the fisherman's wraith,
They can hear him his vow by Saint Judas renew.

XVII.

In the lives of the peasant-folk, tending their vines,
And their barley and olives, ran scarce such hard lines
As the fishermen knew; and it gave Helen food
For reflection the deepest, this people so rude,
Yet so candid and earnest, to study with care,
And their joys and their griefs with them sometimes to share.
She partook of their sentiments as of their cheer,
And was charmed with their manners, unstudied, sincere.
Among other songs gathered from them in her trips
Was one taken by her from the singer's own lips,
And whose pathos unique spoke the spirit and tone
Which proverbially are the Provence peasant's own:

Le Paysan Content.

I.

A peasant I, I know no leisure:
I work from dawn till darkness falls;
No time have I for rest or pleasure;
I only range where duty calls:
But life is dear to me and mine,
And never does my heart repine.

II.

Rises my wife ere light of morning,
And late betakes herself to rest;
She has no gems for her adorning;
Her jewel best is babe at breast:
But life is sweet to wife of mine,
And never does her heart repine.

III.

The good priest in the gloaming shrives us;
For prayers of length our time is scant;
Yet from devotion need ne'er drives us;
Our beads we count, how great our want.
And thus grow hearts of me and mine
Content, and ne'er do we repine.

IV.

Six weans have I, of tender ages,
Each one worth wealth all Provence bears;
Contain not all earth's written pages
Descriptions of such charms as theirs;
Life's lore I'll teach these darlings mine,
And lead them never to repine.

V.

Should king the half his kingdom offer
For these, God's gifts I hold in trust,
I'd spurn with scorn the gilded proffer,
And keep the babes, though with a crust.

No alms I ask for me or mine,
Grudge no man's gold, nor e'er repine.

VI.

The dear Christ, who for us bore sorrows,
Aids me my burdens all to bear;
My heart, though full, no trouble borrows;
We're blest through His blest Mother's prayer.
Thus fills contentment me and mine,
And never do our hearts repine.



CANTO FIFTH.

SHADOWS.

I.

One calm eve, in the crimson-and-gold sunset hour,
Helen saw, as she sat in her vine-covered door,
A conveyance drive through the one street of the town,
And at one of the huts something gently set down,
Which her quick instinct told her was some person ill;
And she hastened to proffer such aid and good will
As one might to soul desolate, faint, or forlorn;
Sought and entered the hut; and there, wasted and worn,
But preserving the impress of native grace still,
Lay the love-hallowed form of dear Madame Marsile.

II.

"Helen, darling," she whispered, "my troubles fade fast;
But they end in my own native hamlet at last.
I have come home to die, as I longed e'er to do;
And my death will be sweetened by being near you,
Remain by me, *ma chère*, till the closing scene ends,
And my eyelids draw down, my most prized of all friends!"

III.

'Twas a labor of love—ah, what tender love now!—
For the trial-versed Helen to press the wan brow,
And to moisten the lips that with fever were parched,
The hot temple to bathe which the burning brain scorched,

And the aching head pillow upon her own breast,
Where her burdens less sorely now seemed to be pressed;
For in face of the sorrows that whelmed this rich life,
Lost to view where her own troubles in the world's strife.

IV.

While attending the sufferer pale, as she lay
In the shadows that deepened with each passing day,
Helen felt to the task consecrated anew,
Which upon her the years had imposed. Doubly true
Was she now to the vow she had taken when earth
Had for her lost its sweetness, joy, music, and mirth,—
When the hard lines of duty in dense gloom were drawn,
And her sky showed no traces of hope's coming dawn.

V.

. . . Days not many had Madame Marsile lingered there,
When a messenger viewless from realms of the air
To the lowly cot came where in patience she lay,
And her tempest-tossed spirit from earth bore away.

VI.

The last words that to Helen her dear friend had said,
Were these:

"Under my pillow, at rest when I'm laid,
In my native Provençal a legend you'll find,
Full of bitterest sadness, with tragic shades lined.
I bequeath it to you; and have only to say,
Ere the tide of my weak breath at last ebbs away,
That the legend but shadows the dark, troubled sea
Which has swept with its waves o'er all mine and o'er me.
O, whatever clouds over your life may have hung,
Thank your God that you listened to conscience while young;
And preserve, though your future with sorrow be brimmed,
The bright jewel of womanhood ever undimmed.

Lower never the standard : true safety lies there :
C'est ma triste, dernière, ardente prière."

VII.

When the poor soul no longer life's tenancy held,
The sad manuscript legacy Helen unsealed,
And translated for Richard ; and thus the weird tale
Her voice bore as bore winds the sea's bay-broken wail :

Death and the Vintner.

FROM THE PROVENÇAL.*

I.

The vintner sat by his thatched cot door ;
He was old, and bent, and wan, and poor.
On the hillside showed a saddening sight—
His vineyard struck with the yellow blight.
'Twas in the province of old Garonne,
The mountainous province, whose power has flown.

II.

The sun toward the hill-tops was sinking low,
But the valley still felt its reddening glow,
Which over the variant landscape shone,
And filled with its glory all Garonne.

III.

In the hush of that silent hour, there rode
A horseman up to the mean abode.
The old man noted his kindly mein :
A gentler presence he ne'er had seen.
A guest he seemed 'twere a joy to greet ;
Shrank not the vintner his gaze to meet.

IV.

"Art all alone ?" asked the stranger mild,
"I have nor friend, nor wife, nor child."

*The Provençal idiom originally extended beyond the old limits of Provence, in Southeastern France, and embraced the region bounded on the east by the Atlantic, on the north by a line running from the department of Gironde, through Dordogne, Creuse, etc., to Savoie; on the east by Italy, and on the south by the Mediterranean.

"The bitterest seemeth thy lot to be."
"My days they are full of misery."
"Hast thou seen nought but wretchedness?"
"I once knew truest happiness."
Then said the guest to the vintner old:
"I fain would hear thy life-tale told."
"Wilt light and sit on my threshold-stone,
And list to an old wight's weary croon?"

V.

The sunset rays from the valley fled,
And left a softened light in their stead;
For yet on the mountain heights they shone,
And gilded the hills of fair Garonne.

VI.

The guest sat down, intent and still.
The old man chattered, as old men will,
And, soothed with a listener, gossiped free,
Becharmed with his own garrulity.
He wandered back to the days of eld,
And a listener intent the stranger held.

VII.

"I once had a wife, who was fair to see,
And friends; and the world went well with me.
My wife had the blood of a southern race;
She had great, black eyes, and an angel-face.
Her long, black hair had well been meet
To wipe the dear Redeemer's feet!

VIII.

"Three lovely babes, which the Virgin blessed,
In turn were pressed to my wife's white breast.
In three glad springs, with the opening flowers,
Came into our home these girls of ours.
Jeannette was the fairest of all the three,
And she was the one that was most like me;
Lisette was dark, with an eye of fire,
And she had her mother's love and ire;

Minette was the gentlest of all in heart—
Had the most of truth, and the least of art.

IX.

"There came to our dale, one summer day,
A tall gallant, with a bearing gay:
A man with hands not hard and brown,
But as soft and white as the eider-down;
Not rough in speech and tone, like me,
But as smooth as the Provence minstrelsy.
He fixed his eyes on my dear Mathilde;
He looked a look through her soul that thrilled.
He dallied long, too long, by her side;
He told her legends of pomp and pride;
Till she dreamed a dream, new, fond, and strange,
Of a life above our low, dull range.
He sang her a strain she had never sung,
Spoke winning words with a flattering tongue,
And breathed a tale of a mansion fair
That she in his native vale might share.
She lost her heart, she lost her truth,
And she lost the honest name of her youth.
She left her babes; she left her race;
She left all hopes of Mary's grace.
With the light, false churl my sweet wife fled,
And I know not now be she quick or dead;
But dead or quick though the frail one be,
God send her a share of my misery!

X.

"My babes sore needed a mother's care,
But they bloomed in beauty bright and rare.
One was a lily, graceful and tall,
Beloved by few, but admired by all;
One was a rose, in sensuous bloom,
O'erladen with its rich perfume;
A violet one, in naïve grace bent,
With its own loveliness content.

XI.

"Jeannette, ashamed of my low degree,
Made base conditions with quality.
Lisette, with passionate hate imbued,
Her hands in vintage of crime imbrued.
Minette wiles treacherous led to yield,
And now she lies in the potter's field.

XII.

"The lily drooped 'neath scornful eyes;
The rose was spotted with purple dyes;
The violet sank in the vale of its birth:
My babes all sleep in the breast of earth.
My vines are withered, my wealth is flown,
And I am left in the world alone."

XIII.

The vintner ceased. His haggard cheek
Was tinged from feelings he could not speak.
There came a gleam to his dull, filmed eye,
Of the fire that burned in the days gone by;
With his torn blouse-sleeve he wiped away
Tears strangers there for many a day.

XIV.

Its mantle gray had the twilight thrown
Over host and guest on the threshold-stone,
For the sun had sunk in his glory down,
Behind the hills of fair Garonne.

XV.

In a kindly tone spake the stranger-guest:
"Methinks thou wishest, of all things, rest."
"Thou sayest sooth," and the old man sighed.
"My name is DEATH," the guest replied.
"Thy grief is great: go thou with me,
And rest and peace thy meed shall be."

XVI.

The vintner crossed himself in dread.
"I deemed thee a friend!" he shuddering said.

Quoth gentle Death: "As a friend I came,
To lift the load from thy heart and frame:
Break they not yet, I will go my way,
And call for thy soul some wearier day."

XVII.

Death mused, as he mounted his pallid horse,
And rode again on his olden course:
"In all the years of my earthly round,
A drearier life have I never found.
Did ever a welcome my coming greet,
Methought twould be in this lone retreat.
But past my ken is all mortal thought:
Met, I'm not wanted; not found when sought;
Where the world is brightest there's most unrest,
And life seems sweetest where death is best."

VIII.

Having finished the tale, Richard's hand in her own
Holding, Helen thus said, in a sad, tender tone:
"O, my husband, appalled I shrink at the soul-dearth,
Degradation, and anguish this legend shades forth;
And I shudder to think of the temptings they bring
To a spirit beclouded with care's shadowing.
When we see the thick darkness that shrouds other lives,
Let us murmur not, when round our own the storm drives,
If it leaves us so much from the wreck that it makes;
If it drops such a share of the treasures it takes."

IX.

Richard backward looked, over his ambitious schemes,
O'er the golden horizon hope bathed with its beams
In rich years of his prime, and on years wasting now,
And saw vanishing all, with a smile on his brow;

Then he said, while he fervently Helen's hand pressed,
And his gaze seemed to find in her eyes grateful rest:
"You are better than all, O, my wife, and my child!
While to me you're preserved, I shall be reconciled!"



CANTO SIXTH.

BEAUTY.

I.

So the years journeyed on, as they will journey on,
Gentle reader, when your work and mine shall be done,
And our hands shall be folded forever and aye.
"Which is old, and exceedingly trite," you may say.
Frankly granted.
But, having life's grand climax seen,—
Having wrought to solution the problem terrene,—
This conclusion reached wisdom-filled old Solomon,
At the end, that "there's nothing new under the sun."

II.

Stand with me in December, and gaze at the trees,
Leafless, naked, and desolate, whipped by each breeze:
Stand again in June's gladness—how changed is the scene!
See that nakedness covered with choice robes of green!
'Tis a tale told by nature, as old as gray time,
And yet fresh as the airs that fanned Eden's sweet prime.
Could we wish that the woods should forget, for a change,
Their rich emerald toilet some spring to arrange?

III.

Listen yonder, where, under the stars' sacred light,
Two souls mingle love's first affirmations, and plight
Troth till death. Their hearts' language is simple, though grand.
And as old as the hills, and as long will it stand.

'Tis the same olden formula: "I love; love me;
Love me truly and only; I love only thee."
How trite seems the fond tale! Yet to them 'tis as fresh
As a world-waking advent of God in the flesh.

IV.

Harken soft in yon chamber, where death sets its seal
On the mother's one child! O, what balsam shall heal
The deep wound? Ah, it cometh, in message as old
As our era; and yet she would have this but told
In the simple words spoken as man never spake,
On the cedar-lined shores of Genessareth's lake.

V.

Good friend, prithee, scorn never the old, nor the worn.
From the worn womb of precedent progress is born.
"Out of old fieldes cometh, fro year unto year,
The new corn," quoth the "morning star" singer of cheer.
"Out of old bookes cometh," likewise, "in good fayth,
"All new science men lere." Nothing "Dan Chaucer" saith
Hath a meaning more pregnant than this.
Old and worn
Are the sunlight; the rainbow; Orion; the morn,
With its golden aurora; the purpling sunset;
The glad moonlight; heaven's arch, all in diamonds set,
Robing night in the glory of creation's dawn.
Worn is speech, sweet and golden as Chrysostom's own.
Worn are truths uttered under the olive-trees' shade
By the Master, of time-seasoned maxims who made
A sure bridge over which mortals freed might be borne
From earth's crudeness to Heaven's courts olden and worn.

VI.

. . . Yes, the years journeyed on. To Mark Landis they passed
Slowly, wearily. Still his attention was pressed,

With an ever-increasing devotion, upon
The bride long ago chosen—the sharp, jealous one,
Who had found him a tried and a true husband-man;
And her bountiful gratitude now overran,
Giving more than he asked in the day of his zest,
When she doubted his faith, and put him to the test.
He had taken front rank among land-tilling men;
He was now Farmer Landis; and none now, as then,
Spoke of him as a make-believe farmer, or sneered
At his soft hands, pale face, or æsthetic-cut beard.

VII.

With good reason! For years a round dozen had run
O'er his head, since, his country's work faithfully done,
From the war he came, bending anew to his task.

VIII.

"And where was his tubercular phthisis?" You ask?
Tell me, where are the thousand and one theories
Of the medical wiseacres, blown on each breeze?
Why, I'll prove to you, friend, if you have any doubt,
That you have meningitis, or typhus, or gout;
Or that you have been poisoned, or haven't, or have,
Or have not, just now one of your feet in the grave.
Bring a case in some court, and subpœna therein,
As experts, sundry sons of old Galen; begin,
By some shrewd lawyer stating the point that is sought
To establish, then ply them with questions well wrought
In the smithy juridical; and you shall take
This my head for a football if I do not make
Good my word.

IX.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
Grand logician before great Agrippa who stood!

Modern magi have broken thy maxim in twain;
And they now, by experiment, simple and plain,
And stout swearing, prove all things, and hold fast to none—
Any longer, that is, than till sought ends are won.

X.

They will swear a man into the grave, then be sworn
That in sweetness of life he laughs dying to scorn.
They will swear that he suffered a torturing death,
A slow poison with measured draughts sucking his breath;
And then, having thus "done him up" ghastly and grim,
With a "presto" will smoothe out each feature and limb,
And through death-passage peaceful as zephyr's soft kiss
Testify he left earth for the regions of bliss.
The œsophagus deftly they'll turn inside out,
And its healthfulness show you beyond any doubt;
Then, the same organ shifting, in turn, outside in,
Clearly prove it as foul as original sin.
To the depths of the lungs diving down, they'll discern
Horrors dread in tubercular shape; then, to earn
A fat fee, observe in the same organs the flush
Of such health as a druggist would put to the blush.

XI.

Old Jack Falstaff declared, to clinch one of his tales,
He'd "swear truth out of England"; and Scripture details
How the wretch Ananias, sad soul-wreck who made,
"To the Holy Ghost lied," in a real-estate trade.
But experts of to-day, to prop pleas, faiths, and biases,
Double-discount fat Falstaffs and false Ananiases.

* * * *

XII.

A LETTER FROM THE CITY.

My Dear Landis:

I know you're a hermit out there;
Though we find you in here (where your calls are too rare)
As agreeable as one could ever desire.
And the object of this missive is to inquire
If you could be induced, for the nonce, my old chum,
To emerge from your cell in your treasured farm home,
And a service perform for old friendship's sake, such
As I hope would be troubling you not overmuch.
My wife's cousin is staying in your neighborhood,
Visiting an old schoolmate. Now, will it obtrude
Too much on your reserve, to ask kindly that you
To our friend an occasional courtesy show
In her sojourn, most likely monotonous, there?
. . . My wife tells me to say to you that Miss Adair—
That is she—is engaged, or, at least, understood
To be, her *fiancé* being just now abroad;
So there's not the least danger of any mistaking
Of these kind attentions of yours. Of match-making,
Thank fate, my good wife is as free as of robbery.
This scheme is no mask, Mark, for that kind of jobbery.
The visit will be one of months, I believe.
Now let's see you your first reputation retrieve
For true gallantry . . . But you were ne'er as adept
In this line as was I. To your studies you kept
When in Florence, oft while upon Arno's fair tide
I was riding, alas, as I'm wonted to ride
On life's circumstance-tide to this day.

Ah, those times!
They come back to me mellowed like hallowed church chimes.
What fine castles we built in the air in those days!
Flown, all flown! What then cared we for blame or for praise?
We were going to plant, then, new standards of art,
From whose principles I was the first to depart!
We were right, my dear fellow, *malgré* my desertion!
Had you, who effected my early conversion
To those maxims eternal of art and of life,
Kept the ranks, I should never have paled in the strife,
But have fought on till now, and have possibly won
Something smacking of fame, which thus far I've not done.
. . . Ghostly shadows of youth! Yourself on a farm, and I—
I have never the pluck had once grandly to try!
To become a mere drudge is so easy in this,
The most jealous of all human callings, and miss
The great prizes that fame is bestowing!
Old friend,—
The one censor to whom I would ever attend,—
Leave your plow, and resume here the palette and brush,
And let's try and regain what we've lost in the rush
Of the tide. It is not yet too late, though our youth
Lie forever behind us. We still have the truth,—
That shall ever be young. We'll grow into its heart,
And baptize ourselves over again in true art.
Do not laugh at my fancies, old boy!
. . . Ah! 'tis just
As I feared! Naught will do, but this wife of mine must
To this note, now too long, add a postscript; and Heaven
Alone knows how long *that* will be! Always,

TRELEVYN.

POSTSCRIPT.

As a hint, he has left, here, but small space for me!
What I wanted to add;—and I'm sure there need be
Not so much ado made over so small a matter;—
("A note!" That's *like man!* What would he call a letter?)—
. . . The truth is, a postscript is often the cream
Of a message; 'tis like the last, lingering gleam
Of a sunset—the holiest moment of day;
Or like fond farewells spoken ere friends sail away
O'er wide seas for the years; or like chorused refrain
Of a song; or the hymn of the reapers when grain
Has been garnered.
A postcript bears home to the heart
Sentiments only meet to be uttered apart;
Weaves a selvage of weft that true sympathy brings:
Turns a faith-hem to guard against heart-ravelings;
Takes up stitches we've dropped in the knitting of life;
Retrieves wrongs done in heat of the world's busy strife;
Reaches down into depths of the spirit, and there
Plants a benison tender as infant's lisped prayer;
Rounds the turf where weeps stricken affection afresh;
Pours sweet balm where care's fetters eat into the flesh;
Parted friendship recalls to hearts sundered through years;
And for love mediates through smiles, pleadings, or tears.
Blest be postscripts!
. . . 'Twas only a word, I declare,
That I wanted to add, which is this: Miss Adair
Has for horses a passionate love. On this head
Nothing further to you, I presume, need be said.
. . . I shall join cousin Blanche near the close of her stay,
And learn then what reports are returned of the way

You acquit yourself of your enjoined gallantry.
Until then, with sincerest regards,

MRS. T.

XIII.

Landis winced when this letter he read; but no more
Could he ever have faltered, when, during the war
Came for duty of peril official behest,
Than now hesitate over this kindly request.
Twas from friends that were olden, from friends that were tried:
This sufficed; and, to friends never false, he complied.

* * * *

XIV.

Blanche Adair was a blonde. Now, faith, this is to say
Little more of my new character, in the way
Of description, than merely to state that this blonde
Was a woman. But when I have said she was crowned
With a head of light hair with which silk would compare
But as commonest wool with a fleece from Cashmere;
When her skin I've pronounced so transparently white,
That the blue veins lined arms, neck, and brow, and the bright,
Rare, and classical beauty of form and of face
Set off with such effect as no sculptor the grace
And no painter the deftness had found to portray;
When I've said, in her soft hazel eyes a look lay
Which was laughter that into sweet sunshine was wrought,
And remained there, as glowing as poet's best thought,—
Some idea may be formed of the style of a blonde,
Who her jauntiest habit one afternoon donned,
With Mark Landis to ride, who appeared with a pair
Of such steeds as to her were as pleasing as rare;

While her gay, "just-too-lovely-for-any-thing" hat,
And her smile, as in saddle she gracefully sat,
Gave a challenge to man and to love.

XV.

Landis thought,
While adjusting her boot in the stirrup, that naught
In the shape of a foot or an ankle (that he
Should have happened the latter to note, I agree
Is a pity profound) had e'er burst with surprise
On an artist's admiring and critical eyes,
In life, marble, or oil, more superbly outlined.

XVI.

Yet not this was the thought dominating his mind,
As he mounted his horse and they galloped away;
But on days he was musing, when one just as gay,
And as beautiful, graceful, and bright as this one
By his side thus oft rode. . . . How the years had since run!

XVII.

—"We are already friends, and I like you right well!"
Awoke him from the moment-brief memory spell;
And he turned, somewhat shocked at so frank a declarement,
And eyed Blanche;
Who explained:
"My warm words of endearment,
I trust you'll perceive, were but meant for the horse!"
. . . 'Tis sufficient to mention, that in the whole course
Of that ride, (or of any one afterward taken,)
Him twice from no brown study had she to waken.

XVIII.

Landis found not an auditor, like Helen Graves,
Satisfied to be borne on the unresting waves



While her gay, "just-too-lovely-for-any-thing" hat,
And her smile, as in saddle she gracefully sat,
Gave a challenge to man and to loue.

Of discourse, stirred by breath of his will arbitrary;
But one quite disposed to start currents contrary,
In glee watch the surgy commotion brought on,
And then pour the rich oil of her humor upon
The aroused and tumultuous billows of thought.
Yet ere many encounters with her, he had caught
The true trend of her mind, had adapted himself
To the real situation, and laid on the shelf
Metaphysics, and ethics, and prophecy too—
A decidedly prudent and shrewd thing to do.

XIX.

For of times that shall be, when the great, teeming womb
Of the future shall give forth its young,—when shall bloom
Next the century plant of philosophy,—when
Golden wisdom shall be made incarnate again,—
When on magi the new star of truth shall have beamed,—
Blanche Adair on her soft, balmy pillow ne'er dreamed;
And her blue-veined and pearly-fair breasts never heaved
With inspirings from things of to-morrow received.

XX.

Of the earth very earthy was Miss Blanche Adair;
But likewise is the rose, with its blossoms so fair;
And likewise is the mavis that sings on the lea,
And the brooklet that murmuring runs to the sea.
If, like them, she breathed only the breath of to-day;
If, like them, she loved earth, with its taint of decay;
Yet like them she was fragrant, and rhythmic, and sweet,
And like them diffused joy where'er wandered her feet.

XXI.

So Mark Landis adjusted his speech to this type
Of earth's sentient felicity, real and ripe;

And he told her of beauty, as artist could tell,
And talked with her of taste, and of music's charmed spell,
And of truth in the concrete, the right and the wrong
Of things which to utility's issues belong;
Of fine horses, good horsemanship, cattle of blood;
Of things current in that no wise dull neighborhood;
Of the live men and women who people To-Day;
Of society (quite in a gossipy way,
And so much so that Mark with himself was surprised,
And, from all that she had by her friends been advised,
None the less thus was Blanche); of the drama; of art
(In its phases objective); and eke of the heart—
Of the average heart human, considered as one
Of life's factors commercial.

XXII.

And here, be it known,
Mark discerned her to be well-informed, and *au fait*,
And so keenly discriminating, in her way,
With such store of sound, shrewd, worldly wisdom indued.
And so strongly with common-sense ethics imbued,
That he found himself listening oftener, and longer,
Than of one so much older, and wiser, and stronger,
In years, mind, and purpose, would scarce be supposed,—
More especially one understood to have closed
With the opposite sex all relations, and drawn
The heart's curtains most closely and carefully down.

XXIII.

At least, this was the view which the gossips all took;—
And whoever hath found on this earth one lone nook
Where the gossip comes not, will please "rise up and stand
Until counted"; for if, in some strange clime or land,

Such a spot there may be, let it be marked with gold,
In books bound all in pearl let the story be told,
And in far-sounding strains of bard-laureate's song,
And let seraphs in azure the echoes prolong!

. . . They—the gossips, not seraphs, nor bards—said:
"'Twas strange
That the General should in so short a time change
From recluse to gay, spruce cavalier; 'twas to pay
A poor compliment to the attractions that lay
(If he'd had keen discernment) here at his own door,
To chase butterflies—and *such* a thing, to be sure!—
One all feathers and paint! And they call *her* a beauty!
To expose such a jade is a most sacred duty!
Yet that *he* should be caught in so flimsy a net
Is a marvel the queerest one ever yet met.
Of the grave and the giddy, my! what a sad blending!"

XXIV.

. . . "But whither," my muse asks, "is our hero tending?"

CANTO SEVENTH.

RESIGNATION.

I.

The Heart's Pentecost.

I.

The sea sings strains of mystic meaning;
The weird refrains the wild winds swell;
But sea nor wind my wish o'erweening
Accord, and me their import tell.
Then soul of mine within me says:
"In patience wait the flower of days.

II.

I wait; and, lo! a guest unbidden,
Great Nature, in some silent hour,
Comes to my heart, in gloom long hidden,
And grants it Pentecostal power;
And thus the songs of wind and sea
Are rendered to my soul and me.

III.

Yet what the purport of their message
I may not, in words spoken, tell,
Though close my spirit cons each passage,
And all the lays my heart learns well;
But this I know, and this I sing:
Their strains peace passing utterance bring.

II.

Thus, upon the white beach of the storm-breaking bay,
Sitting, watching the gay fisher-boys at their play,

And the fishermen mending their nets, and their wives
Gleaning driftwood from wrecks, (as from strewn wrecks of
lives
The world ever is gathering driftwood to feed
Fires low burning of lone human hearts in their need,)
Sang, to rhythm of power-spent storms' sobbing waves,
The enlarged, bettered, proved, fire-refined Helen Graves,—
The girl still in the woman revealed, and the soul
Through the years but achieving a gentler control,—
Sang, while, lovingly listening there at her side,
Sat the dear child of promise, Celeste, the large-eyed;
Who thus said:

"Darling mother, of all the grand strains
Of the grandest of singers, with chorused refrains,
That we heard in Palermo, or Naples, or Rome,
I heard none like the dear ones I hear at my home.
Yes, of all the sweet singings your songs are the best!"
Thus with downright truth flattered the dark-eyed Celeste.

III.

Surely, this is no longer a child's voice we hear,
That so soothingly melts in the fond mother's ear;
And so thought Helen Rolfe, as she close to her breast
The bright bud of developing womanhood pressed.
"Ah! full fast does she ripen 'neath this southern sun;
All too soon her fledged heart will its flight wing alone;
All too early life's lessons her soul will have read;
All too quickly her feet love's red wine-press will tread;
All too oft will her spirit the bitterwort taste,
Springing e'er by life's wayside, 'mid bloom or 'mid waste!"

IV.

Lightly had the years touched Helen Rolfe, nestling there,
With her one tender charge, and her one tender care,—

Nestling there, 'neath the shelter of brown, vine-clad hills,
Safe from world-breath that wears and from world-gaze that
chills.

V.

Richard had at times mended so strongly, that they,
Convalescence inviting, rode out on the bay,
And rocked him on its breast, in the fishermen's boats;
Then made longer trips, touching at charmed, classic spots
On the shores of that broad mid-earth sea which are dear
To all hearts Europe's dream of the past who revere;
And 'twas during these jaunts Celeste heard voices sing
With whose melody magic fame's corridors ring.

VI.

Helen still at her art wrought; nor did she neglect
Still romances, and legends, and songs to collect,
From the natives as well of Provence as from those
Of yet other lands through which the storied stream flows
Which the present refreshes with cooling waves brought
From the times when in earnestness men wrought and fought,
When, though working and fighting in shadows, yet they
In their earnestness left lessons rich for to-day.
In all these recreations Celeste had a part,
Who a love had begun to develop for art,
And those other gifts wherein the mother had shone,
Her instruction, thus far, having been Helen's own.

VII.

A strange ballad, one day, Helen heard, which struck cords
In her heart that long vibrated; and, while the words
Of the song in Romance dialect had been sung,
She observed that its measure appeared to have sprung
From the skalds of the far Scandinavian climes;
And, as best she could, thus she translated the rhymes:

The Quest for the Balm Content.

AN ALLEGORY.

I.

The wind blew fair; the wind blew free;
The wind blew over a sun-bright sea.

My ship was trim; my ship was staunch;
A comelier never did mortal launch.

The wheel by the helmsman Faith was manned;
He held the rudder with steadfast hand.

The freight of my ship was the dreams of youth;
The silken streamer was legended "Truth."

The master Hope went into command;
The bright bow of promise the blue sky spanned.

Sole owner was I of keel and crew,
And lord of the master and helmsman true.

We sailed out into the beckoning West;
We shaped our course for the Isles of the Blest.

In those fair realms, in the heart enshrined,
The Balm Content I had hoped to find.

II.

The wind blew strong; the wind blew high;
The wind blew out of a darkened sky.

The ribs of the good ship creaked and ground;
The waves of the great sea sobbed and moaned.

The roar of the blast still louder grew;
It drowned the shouts of master and crew.

'Mid bursting of billows and lightning's glare,
We waited our fate in mute despair.

III.

The storm went by. Our sails were rent,
Our cordage loosed, our strong masts bent.

The helmsman stood with a saddened face;
The master moved with a slackened pace.

. . . A Mentor old, unknown to me,
Had shipped in our vessel's company.

He said: "Who trusts to the ocean's tide,
Alike must storm and calm abide.

"The heart that quails at the angry blast
Deserves not peace when the storm be past."

IV.

The isles I sought in the Occident
Grew not for me the Balm Content.

The air was burdened with indolence;
A vague disquiet oppressed the sense.

I sighed for the wild and angry gales
That swept with vigor my own green vales.

I weighed my anchor, and out of the West
I sailed with a ballast of dull unrest.

My Mentor said: "Thou'lt find no strand
With sweeter yield than thy parent land."

I said: "I'll pass to the sunlands fair,
And make the search for my balsam there."

V.

I sailed full long the Southern seas,
With smiling sky, with favoring breeze.

I found no isle, I touched no shore,
Where grew the tree my balm that bore.

My Mentor said: "Thy soul doth tire:
Thou art no nearer thy soul's desire.

"Not seas of the South, not isles of the West,
Yield what springs only within thy breast."

VI.

With aching heart, with feverous brow,
I homeward turned my vessel's prow.

Once more the wind blew fair and free,
Once more the sunshine mantled the sea.

The helmsman steered with a trembling hand;
The master wielded a weak command.

The crew were weary; the ship was worn;
The faded streamer in twain was torn.

My strength had vanished; my pride had fled;
Ah, me! How the years of my life had sped!

VII.

I saw the bounds of my native lea;
My heart beat high with expectancy.

Moss hung my natal roof-tree o'er;
The form of a stranger stood in the door.

But Nature's face was all unchanged;
The smiles of Heaven unstinted ranged.

The grass was green, the birds' songs gay;
The rivulet rippled its life away.

All blooms of the field their fragrance shed;
"God lives for aye!" my soul to me said.

Then into my spirit sweet peace was sent;
And my heart was healed by the Balm Content.

VIII.

From these jaunts Richard often had strengthened returned,
And in spirit refreshed, till at length now he yearned
To go back to the land of his birth; and they made
Preparations to leave the quaint town's silent shade;
When the overstrained mental exertion brought on
A relapse; and the hope, so brief-seasoned, was gone.

IX.

Then the dread leaden tiger, which crouching long lay
At the gate of the heart, making spring for its prey,

Seized upon it; the strength of the remnant of life
Yielded swiftly; and Richard Rolfe knew that the strife
Neared its close.

X.

From his window, in autumn's soft air,
He saw grapes purpling 'neath thrifty vine-dressers' care
On brown hillsides, safe sheltered from blasts of the north;
Saw the rill from the near mountain's side gushing forth;
Heard blithe carols of birds, which familiar had grown
To his ear in the white years that o'er him had flown
In his love-prison there; the endeared incense breathed
Of the floral wealth round his low, trellised cot wreathed,
Overfreighting the air with a grateful perfume;
Saw the sorrowing peasants, in deep sympathy,
With steps measured and noiseless his doorway pass by;
Felt the southern sun's warmth, that had long bathed his room
With the crimson of sunsets and dawns' flaming gold,
Which for him were now numbered; and, brave as of old,
Smiled as martyrs once smiled in arenas of Rome,
Grouped in waiting for hungry wild beasts forth to come.
Though no cure for his body earth's stores can supply,
And in fate's book 'tis writ, Richard Rolfe has to die,
Richard Rolfe's soul, undaunted, looks fate in the face,
And sublimely greets death with a hero's own grace.

* * * *

XI.

Bending over his couch were the two dear to him.
As life's light in the gathering shadows grew dim,
There was something he whispered for Helen to hear,
Which was meant for none else than her privileged ear.

She knelt down; and, while Richard was clasping her hand,
There came down the right angel and severed earth's band;
Then, for one supreme moment of joyous relief,
In a sunburst of glory was dimmed terrene grief;
And, on prayer breathed by her his enfranchised soul rode
Out through ambient ether, and up to its God.



CANTO EIGHTH.

REMEDILESSNESS.

I.

The old Wrenthams, of Wrentham Hall, near to the sea,
In the rich shire of Devon, were high of degree,
And were clean of repute. They had served from far back,
In the council and field, without shame, without fleck;
And sole heir was Ray Wrentham to all the demesne,
Where his race had served, flourished, and high honors seen,
Through the brightest of ages that England has known,
And had done their full portion to build her renown.
He was fair of complexion, with eyes of deep blue,
And with great wealth of hair, of a bright auburn hue;
Squarely stood on his feet, and was lusty of limb;
Thus the pure Saxon type was developed in him.

II.

And Ray Wrentham, of Wrentham Hall, blue-eyed and fair,
Was the lover, devoted, of Miss Blanche Adair.
You'd of course like to know, reader, how it should come,
That this Englishman wandered so far from his home,
Thus a sweetheart to woo, when the land of his birth
Teemed with some of the loveliest women of earth.

III.

It was thus that Ray Wrentham had met Blanche Adair:
They descended the Rhine on a day aught but fair,

When the heavens, ill-tuned, upon frowning seemed bent,
And the heart, sympathizing, breathed dull discontent.
All the passengers under the spell seemed to be
Of the foul-weather spirit, save one *côterie*
Of choice Germans engaged upon subjects profound,
Whose depths never a lead-line of sailor could sound,
Mingling themes of Wahrheit, Ewigkeit, und so weiter,
To the Teuton so dear when the spirit is heiter,
With such topics as Krieg, Kaiser, Ruhm, Reiterei,
And those touching the brew of the best Brauerei.

IV.

With her traveling party entire, Blanche had grown
So insufferably *ennuyé*, that a yawn
In despair escaped her.
At this moment she caught
The blue eyes of one tortured likewise; and she thought:
"If those fine orbs were now closely fixed on my own,
I don't think that the hours would so dully drag on;
And I doubt whether I should of yawning once dream;
While Sir Blue Eyes from gaping-bonds I could redeem:
So I think."
Thiswise thinking, she rose from her seat,
And, with guide-book in hand—"last edition, complete"—
And while most of her friends were in slumber's still deeps,
With intentness surveyed Father Rhine's castled steeps.

V.

Not long thus had she stood, when the blue-eyed approached,
And a meet topic for conversation thus broached,
After having saluted her with such a grace
As of seeming presumption removed every trace:
"If I may be forgiven for what might seem rude,
And you'd kindly permit me so far to intrude

On your privacy, pleading this villainous weather,
Which makes us all dismal and dumpish together,
I should like to contribute whatever I may
To enliven the gloom of this saturnine day.
If agreeable, I will endeavor for you
To point out, as I may be enabled to do,
Some scenes worthy of study, as we shall pass on—
Views with which my sight very familiar has grown,
As I've many times traveled this route heretofore."

VI.

"'Twould contribute much to my enjoyment, I'm sure,"
Him thus answered, with frankness and grace in her air,
And with no trace of prudery, sweet Blanche Adair.

VII.

Then he said:

"'Tis too bad, the poor guide-books to scold
As we do. They are useful, and helpful, though old;
And, like friends on whose benefits daily we count,
We are apt to misreckon the gentle amount
Of the good that they do. It is true that they tell
Their tales all in one fashion, and equally dwell
On each theme, great or small, whate'er space it may fill
In earth's records, as if each were ground through a mill.
But mankind feed on grists; and the few only strive
On fresh pabulum mental or moral to thrive.
To the many these stories teem richly with zest,
All the faculties charming with thrilled interest,
Though to some they drag on like the wearisome drone
Of the bee, or the katydid's dull monotone.

VIII.

"If a guide-book could be for the separate taste
Of each voyager written, what infinite waste

Of good paper and ink would the sated world see,
And what Rhines of rhetorical wash would there be!
Let us thank the good fates that we have nothing worse
In the way of guide-books for depleting the purse;
For they're surely more honest than most books we read,
In that these spread no nets with intent to mislead;
And, while half that they give is pure legend, as such
They present it, and not in the shape of a crutch
Crippled logic to prop. For, with all we can do,
Guide-books will be guide-books."

IX.

—"And be nothing like you!"
Thought, but certainly did not once venture to say,
The pleased Blanche, as the Englishman chatted away.

X.

Then he told, as they passed, of traditions which hung
Castled ruins around that to storied heights clung;
And showed what was yet left of the glories of old;
What to-day's green enrobed, and what yesterday's mold;
What tales anchorage had in historical truth,
And what ones baseless were as the fancies of youth.
And these things all he said in so pleasant a way,
That what had been begun as a stupid, dull day,
Though the weather was poor as one ever will see,
An enjoyable, red-letter day proved to be;
And Blanche learned of the Rhine and its castle-crowned shores,
And of legends that live in their myth-mingled stores,
More than she could from guide-books have possibly gained,
Had she o'er them a fortnight in deep study strained.

XI.

'Twas in this way they met.
But, pray, don't understand
That in love with each other they fell out of hand,—
Not at all; for they both were quite wide-awake souls,
And each somewhat had seen of love's breakers and shoals.
No, no; each was alive, and alert, and on guard;
And in love at first sight falling each held absurd.

XII.

And yet, nevertheless, did the young English squire
Get so deeply enlisted as soon to inquire
The direction the group to which Blanche was attached
Was to take, and himself thereupon he detached
From his own party, and followed hers.
And thus sprang,
Like Minerva from Jove's odd occipital pang,
A strong-born, full-armed, first-class flirtation, extending
O'er continents twain; for when Blanche, her tour ending,
Returned to her home in the West, soon, behold!
Thither Ray Wrentham came, his love-leaguer to hold.

XIII.

It was one of the rarest flirtations that ever have been
Between woman and man on this green earth yet seen.
Blanche Adair, of a truth, had of suitors no lack:
One might say that they came, as they went, at her beck;
For, as fast as the doom of the old lovers rang,
Like heads fabled of Hydra the new ones up sprang;
And the old ones watched ever her heart's swinging gate,
Like the spirits that outside of Paradise wait.
. . . And, right into the midst of this plethora, came
From afar the proud lover with long-honored name.

XIV.

The new knight in the joust was the favorite now;
But how long would this last? Not a soul could avow.
Wrentham thus in the contest was clearly ahead,
When by tidings called home of a relative dead.

XV.

And this brings us to when, in the blush of the year,
As a fate, one might say, to Mark Landis's sphere,
In her radiant beauty, the sweet Blanche Adair
Came, to light with her presence the neighborhood there,
The vicinity gossips to set by the ears,
And our farmer to rouse from the dreams of the years.

XVI.

. . . It was strange—was it not?—in the farthest degree,
That two beings from opposite shores of life's sea—
That two natures so little alike, and apart
So extremely in mind, and in soul, and in heart,
Should be thus thrown together. And stranger it was,
That each seemed to be well entertained.
Mental laws,
Ye philosophers, seek not too close to expound,
Lest phenomenal facts all your wisdom confound.
There are things, in the realm of the heart and the brain,
That the angels themselves would scarce try to explain.

XVII.

Blanche extended her visit so long, that there came
From the city some calls from the moths round her flame
That impatiently fluttered; and these only served
To Mark's own self to show, what had been well observed
By his friends, that his mind was becoming absorbed
In this luminant being—this planet, full-orbed,
Of etherial beauty; for he was disturbed

By these moths as should ne'er be one so unperturbed
By affairs of this trivial nature as he,
The confirmed bachelor, was reputed to be.

XVIII.

But all visits, in time, must approach to an end,
As did that made by Miss Blanche Adair to her friend;
And, as promised, came Mrs. Trelevyn, to learn
How Mark had his commission discharged, and discern
The effect Blanche's beauty had had upon him,
And if Ray Wrentham's star had grown anywise dim;
For, although no match-maker, as had been premised
At the start, whereof Mark was distinctly advised,—
Notwithstanding this, Mrs. Trelevyn was human,
And Mrs. Trelevyn, throughout, was all woman.

XIX.

"Pray, Blanche, open your confidence-doors, as of old,
And the net yield of this new acquaintance unfold.
What impression has our friend the General wrought
On your heart, or your soul, or your sense, or your thought?
Has he kept himself closed, like an oyster, to you,
Or expanded and beamed, as he only can do?"

XX.

Just then one of those moods seized upon Blanche Adair,
Of quite heart-to-heart frankness, with women so rare;
And she said to her friend, while the light in her eyes
Showed an earnestness filling the friend with surprise:

XXI.

"Cousin, had I met him in the days that are gone,—
Had I known him ere into world-ways I had grown,—
I had loved him through life to the dimness of death!
I should then have known something of treasures earth hath
For the faithful and true; for I *could* have been true—

O, so true!—to a love 'neath *his* nursing that grew.
. . . Him I first thought to master;—indeed, for a while,
He seemed captive to be 'neath the charm of my smile;
But ere long the supremacy he had assumed,
And he conquered me, clamped me! Strong eloquence bloomed
In his speech; power masterful marked all his mien.
What could woman do 'gainst such a will, so serene,
All-assumptive, all-holding? What could Blanche Adair
Do, but fall in the dust and pay him homage there?"

XXII.

"Cousin Blanche! What means this? Why, dear, I had supposed
That your heart was Ray Wrentham's, that he had proposed,
And that all was arranged."

XXIII.

"What webs we women weave!
How ourselves do we and one another deceive!
Cousin mine, in my lessons in world-wisdom, gained
At expense of the freshness of heart that once reigned
In my germinant being, this fact I have found:
That of all the heart-strangers in life's broadened bound,
The most widely removed oft in confidence true
Are female bosom-friends.

"I disclose now to you,
While the humor is on me, that, having once met
This man, all other men I would gladly forget.
Had I never known him, I could Wrentham have loved—
Loved well-nigh with true love. But your kindness has proved
Only cruelty to me, though meant for the best."

XXIV.

"I don't see," said the cousin, "since you've thus confessed
To these feelings, why you cannot still make exchange

Of Ray Wrentham for Landis. For you 'twere not strange,
If you'll pardon me for the remark; while the heart
Of the Briton I think would scarce break with the smart
Of dismissal. And though he possesses, of course,
High birth, fortune, and standing, yet Landis's purse,
I am told, is well filled, and my husband thinks yet
He may gain some distinction. And do not forget
That love's *something*, though only a fractional part,
To be thought of in things that affect hand and heart."

XXV.

"Ah, my worldly-wise cousin," said Blanche, "you've left out
One important factor in this scheme you have wrought.
I have probed this man's heart, and I know what is there,
At least, what is *not* there—love for poor Blanche Adair.
I've no doubt he is pleased with me: why, a crowned king
Could not fail to be pleased with me, did I but bring
To bear on him the art I've employed on your friend—
The art which to us women oft evil stars send.
But I tell you, dear cousin, I've reached for the heart
Of Mark Landis! In this I but played an old part;
I laid snares for it; lured it on; angled for it.
Any other heart long since had had to submit;
For you know very well that I've failed never yet
Heart of man to subdue when about it I set."

XXVI.

"Yes, I know," archly answered the cousin; "like tent
Of some Indian brave, which his scalps ornament,
Your wigwam with full many scalp-locks is adorned;
And by your renowned prowess I should have been warned,
My dear Blanche; yet I had not expected that you
Would the war-path with General Landis pursue."

XXVII.

"Then you should not have brought us together," Blanche said;
"But, *n'importe;* it is over. The error you've made
I sincerely forgive. But that you may now know
That I have a heart left, let me say this to you:
That to-day, as you see me, the proud Blanche Adair,
In the world so absorbed, that to her seems so fair,—
I would all exchange gladly, were Landis as poor
As the drudge whose toil scarce keeps the wolf from the door;
Yea, I'd give up Ray Wrentham and his rich demesne,
For this heart all of gold."

* * * *

XXVIII.

'Twas asked, what did it mean
That Ray Wrentham home tarried so long? Time had flown
On slow pinions with gay Blanche Adair while had grown
Into serious months the wide gap since he left
For his home, and her heart felt bereft,
Till she met with Mark Landis, since when she confessed
To herself that that organ had known small unrest.
Although charming Ray's letters had been, yet they failed
To account for his lengthened delay. He had sailed,
He declared, on a brief return bent, yet leaves sere
In the old Devon woods had begun to appear,
Though scarce formed when he landed at home.
Rumor stirred,
Breathing of an attraction abroad; yet Blanche heard
But to laugh at the legend. And still there was pique
Just the slightest; and more strongly then did she seek

To please Landis, whose calls, at her city home made,
While not frequent, were rare not as angels' calls paid.

XXIX.

Nor did these efforts cease after Wrentham returned
And renewed his devoirs, which, of course, when he learned
Of a rival, had but more demonstrative grown;
While her poise Blanche regained.
So the play still went on,
As plays numberless round us proceed day by day,
On the variant stage of this world, where display
With concealment, truth clear as the dawn's virgin light,
With truth's converse, enrobed in her livery bright,
And love true as the trust of the martyr in death,
With love's counterfeit, robed in the vestments of faith,
All combine the *chiaro oscuro* to give,
Which art needs to make dramas the lives that we live.

CANTO NINTH.

EMBERS.

I.

A grand party: the finest the season had seen.
Gathered there, and commingled, 'mid glitter and sheen,
Were high genius, and culture, and valor, and worth;
There were dignified bearing, and cognizant birth;
There were taste, elegance, fashion, *delicatesse;*
There were gentleness, tenderness, sweetness, and grace;
And refinement's true charm; and bright, heavenly smiles;
And clear, silvery laughter; and beauty's soft wiles.
There were all of these, with an infusion, not small,
Of their opposites; making a part integral,
A true section of life, with its good and its bad,
And its fine and its coarse, and its joyous and sad,
And its true and its false, and its substance and show,
And its bliss bright as day, and its neatly masked woe.

II.

Of our friends quite a number, good reader, were there.
First of all, white and fair, was the gay Blanche Adair;
Still as fresh as the morn, and with no vestige faint,
Or suggestive suspicion, of powder or paint
In her face, which was clear as the crystalline wave
In which, making their toilets, the mermaidens lave.
The Trelevyns were there; and Ray Wrentham was there;
And the moths were all there, each with sad, helpless air,
And a look of lost glory.

III.

The hour had grown late
When Mark Landis appeared. Blanche, in wait
For his coming, could scarcely conceal a warm thrill
Of delight.
"Wicked man! More than one fine quadrille
Which poor I had reserved for your pleasure has passed
Like the joys of life's morning, and this one, the last,
Just to heap coals of fire on your culpable head,
Shall be given to you," she bewitchingly said.

IV.

When the set had been formed, Blanche still so absorbed Mark,
That he failed to observe two eyes, lustrous and dark,
To his own *vis-à-vis;* and 'twas only when brought
Close in contact with them, that was suddenly wrought
In his breast a sensation.
One moment he stood,
As by spear transfixed, or as with feet to earth glued;
But a gentle arm-pressure from Blanche brought him back
From his wanderings brief in brown revery's track,
Bringing home an apology.

V.

"Who's the brunette,
The sweet vision, pray tell me, that graces this set?"
He inquired of Blanche, who, shrewdly smiling, replied:

VI.

"'Tis a General's daughter, whose brave father died
Two years since, when abroad, from old wounds of the war.
She's the brightest advent of the season thus far.
Intellectual, graceful, keen, and, as you see,
As transcendent in feature as beauty can be.
Have you now first observed her?"

VII.

"In truth. I could ne'er
In neglect have passed by such a face, such an air,
Such a form, even when in the presence of one
Who in genuine beauty precedence to none
Among women need yield."

VIII.

A like round compliment
He had never yet paid her. She knew it was meant
In its fullest of force. All self sentiently glowed
With the keenest delight, which each lineament showed.

IX.

"Please present me, Miss Blanche; I believe I have known
The girl's father in years that are very long gone."

X.

Blanche Adair, with faults thick as were heroes in Thrace,
In her nature of envy had never a trace;
And she grudged not a fitting occasion to take,
With the new *débûtante* Mark acquainted to make.

XI.

Before this Provence-rose as he bowed, standing there,
In the height of the fashion attired, and his hair,
In its dark, bushy wealth, showing not the least shade
Of a change in its hue, one would surely have said,
If unknown the facts of their respective life spheres,
That between the two slight was the balance in years.
Introductions exchanged, the girl mused, with a glance
At Mark Landis, and in recollection's expanse
With her large, darkling eyes something far seemed to see;
And dim echoes on pinions of strained memory
Came at sound of his name—mellowed echoes that sprang
Where her life-dawning's jubilant gladness first rang.

XII.

"Though since infancy I have my own native shore
Seen but lately, yet must I have met you before:
You, I hope, are my dear father's friend of that name."
This as sweetly, and gently, and graciously came
From her lips, as, in halcyon summers of old,
From the lips of another came phrases of gold.

XIII.

"I remember," said Landis, "in war's bitter day,
When, from wounds sore and wearing, exhausted I lay,
Daily came to my cot, bearing floral perfume,
Holding in her wee hands the spring's opulent bloom,
A large-eyed flower-girl; and her glad presence there
Gave me strength, gave me patience, my anguish to bear,
And made fragrant all seasons since then that have flown;
And I think the same eyes look now into my own."

XIV.

Then the vision, upon this reminder from him,
To Celeste came o'er dun downs of memory dim;
And she saw the old scene, in the tent where they lay,
Both the father and friend, under one gentle sway;
And two tears in the depths of her glistening eyes
Mark saw form into shape, into pearls crystallize;
Then, as he the discourse on less sad matters turned,
With surprise this concerning her mother he learned:
"She has been some days at the old farm," said Celeste,
"Where I join her as soon as my stay here is passed.
We have come to remain with my grandfather there,
Who, in gathering age, needs my mother's close care."

* * * *

XV.

Mark was back on his farm.
And back thus to this scene
Where life's spring had with bourgeoned hopes radiant been.
Had come Helen, that might by her care be beguiled
Years for him who through lustrums long had for his child
In calm hope and in patient faith waited,—years now
Softly fading like winter's last remnants of snow.
A prolonged Lenten season that old heart had passed,
But the glad Easter-time had dawned on it at last.

XVI.

O'er the new phase existence presented to him
Mark sat ruminant long, in twilight shadows dim.
"I must call—call at once; I must neighborly be,"
Was the course he marked out for himself. "What if she
The old friendship not now to renew should prefer?
I must *my* duty do, whatsoe'er may occur."

XVII.

. . . Yes, he called.
The two met, as meet those who across
Swollen tides hail each other—tides bearing the loss
Inundations have caused,—met, and spoke, as if wide
Still between them stretched seas; and there was on each side
The restraint, the reserve, that the last scenes had marked
Ere she had with her duplicate burden embarked
To seek peace for the years.

XVIII.

Landis called once again.
Would she drive with him?
Yes; for she could not refrain;
She could be but kind, courteous, pleasant, polite;
And he?—he was the same.

Had, then, all the old light
That illumined these lives in each breast died away?
Were the embers extinct, to glow no more for aye?

XIX.

They drove not through green lanes, by meandering streams,
Or through groves tenanted but by birds and by dreams:—
By no means. 'Twas a wide-awake, real-life drive,
In which neither sought aught of dream-life to revive.

XX.

Mark drove round his great farm; showed his fences and sheds;
His fine orchard; his garden; his strawberry beds;
His prize horses and cattle; his pigs and his sheep;
Told her which was the cheapest and best breeds to keep;
And exhibited to her his pets, and descanted
Long on all of their traits, and their qualities vaunted;
And all this he went through with a business-like grace,
As if she were proposing to purchase the place.

XXI.

Then he touched upon Richard, with tender respect;
And he spoke of his struggles, his useful years wrecked;
Of Provence, and of Europe; and hoped she would find
The change back to the prairie-life one to her mind.
But in never a place where allusion were apt
Had sought either the corse that the long years enwrapped
To uncover, by tone, or suggestion, or look,
In the whole of the lengthened, diversified talk;
—Save but once. As they passed by a rich pasture-field,
Helen, seeing a courser gigantic in build,
Said in casual tone:
"You still cultivate breeds
Of strong horses, I see."

XXII.

"Yes; but ne'er other steeds
Have I owned like the pair of which this one alone
Remains living, whose work-days forever are done.
Me he bore in peace-days, as in days of war's gloom,
And links me with the seasons when hearts were in bloom."

XXIII.

Helen passed the theme by, and it quietly slept,
And henceforth to the shore she more rigidly kept.

XXIV.

The drive had been a long one, and shadows were slant
Before homeward they turned, and soon daylight grew scant—
Scant as spirit or life in their guarded discourse,
Which had run like a lazy, dull stream in its course.

XXV.

At her house, Helen said:

"Did I not understand
You are going some days in the city to spend?"
"Yes."
"A favor I ask, then."
"You have but to say
What it is."

XXVI.

"My dear child is now making a stay
Of some weeks in the city; and, while she is there,
It would be a great kindness to her, could you *spare*
[And there seemed some slight stress on this word to be laid]
A stray hour, now, and then, for a call to be made
At the friends' whom she visits, who, too, are your friends,
I believe.
"She is studying hard toward ends
Which I fear she may never attain, though I know

The dear girl has some talent. Pardon me if I show
Something done by her hand."

XXVII.

Then the fond mother brought
For inspection a number of landscape views, wrought
By Celeste in their Mediterranean home.
With a look which could ne'er from feigned interest come,
Mark glanced over the sketches he held in his hand,
While his features by Helen were anxiously scanned;
Then remarked:

"The girl's hand has been well disciplined;
Some correct principles of design she has gleaned,
Which will be of great benefit in her pursuit
Of art, if she aspires to reach after its fruit
With a patient and sedulous arm."

XXVIII.

There came now
Into Helen Rolfe's features a warm, honest glow,
The first sign of emotion yet made manifest.
She rejoined:

"If you could but say this to Celeste,
I am sure it would nerve her to efforts severe
And unceasing; for she has been taught to revere
Your opinions—by her adored father."

The close
Of the sentence seemed specially measured.

XXIX.

Mark rose,
And again, as he had at the first of these calls,
Glanced at paintings that hung on the old parlor walls,
Each one closely surveying.

"These larger ones are,

I should judge, by one hand. They are certainly far
Above average pieces brought home from abroad,
And the artist must be with marked talent endowed.
There is palpably shown a most exquisite care
In his efforts. He has conscientiousness rare,
And is clearly imbued with the essence of taste.
Perhaps he it was tutored your daughter Celeste?"

XXX.

"She obtained from him some useful hints," Helen said,
"But the girl very sparing instruction has had.
She has drawn much from nature, and happiest seems
When with sketch-book among the hills, valleys, and streams."

XXXI.

"Now I know her instruction has been sure and sound;
For no rival of nature has ever been found
As a teacher, if she but be followed in sooth.
But, ah, me! modern art strays so widely from truth!
In art-efforts the tempting seems ever to be
To get too far from nature. All artists agree
In this precept, and yet nearly all of them fail
To pursue it in practice. Sure, nought can avail
All the strivings of hand, all the studies of brain,
While the devotee follows false gods to his bane."

XXXII.

As these words fell from Mark, Helen wandered in dreams;
For the past was brought back, with its auroral beams;
And again was her glad youth before her, and he,
Its true Mentor, stood there, and scarce changed seemed to be,—
Stood attesting, as he had attested of old,
Living truth, and, as then, dross detaching from gold.

XXXIII.

Mark now added:

"I certainly cannot refrain
From recurring to this Provence artist again.
If you'll give me his name and address, I believe
I will give him an order; or will you receive
The commission, and send it to him?"

XXXIV.

"Yes. His name,
Having not even anything like local fame,
I can't give you just now; but the order I'll take
And transmit it; and what stipulations you make
I will see that most faithfully he shall observe."

XXXV.

"Well," said Mark, "these poor fellows strive hard, and deserve
All encouragement one is disposed to bestow.
You may let him paint for me two pictures, as you
Or as he may deem best. Only these terms I make,
That for me the same pains here evinced he shall take."

XXXVI.

. . . As he drove toward his farm, things like these Landis thought:
"It is over at last, and the sooner forgot
Is the long dream, the better for her and for me.
Let me bury it out of my sight.
"Well has she
Her grand purpose fulfilled. What have I with her life
To do now? How should I enter into the strife
When the triumph is gained, and the recompense won—
I, who victory have none to boast? All is done!"

XXXVII.

And wouldst know, reader, what it was Helen, too, said
To herself when her old friend was gone, while her head
She bowed down in her hands, and in silence sat long?

"So it ends, the long tale!—this love which was so strong!—
This love which should endure while the years ran their course!—
This love which should prove true as its eternal source!
And to yield up for yonder love my memory!
And of that love not sure! O, Mark Landis, to see
Your great heart wasted on a mere fragment of love,
Is a sight the deep pity of angels to move!"

XXXVIII.

But, good Helen, up Yonder they get not their view
Of time's scenes through the same lenses earthlings peer through;
And they scrutinize both sides of all cases human—
Something down here the rarest in man or in woman.
Why, if angels were moved whene'er mortals went maying,
Or o'er men and maids grieved in flirtation's ways straying,
The entire corps celestial 'twould so close absorb
To look after things on this most troublesome orb,
That scant time would they have in their own pearled domain
The due, requisite order and care to maintain.
Thus their own way to make have the subjects of love
In this struggle-filled world, with small help from Above;
For the truth is, so much of love is not divine,
That the Heavenly heralds, on mission benign
Should they visit earth, balm for love's miseries bearing,
Would not know who the blessing were worthy of sharing.

CANTO TENTH.

REMORSE.

I.

To the city his visit Mark made the next day,
And kept promise with Helen; for he, in such way
As true courtesy prompted, exerted his best,
And his gentlest, to make with the charming Celeste
The time pass pleasantly.

II.

There had flitted a shade
O'er Mark's features when he the discovery made,
That, as Wrentham across his path frequently ran
When he called upon Blanche, the bright young Englishman
Not infrequently was by him latterly passed,
Calling also upon the delightful Celeste.
But in one of Mark's heart-warming visits to her,
As occasion occurred to this theme to refer,
Of Ray Wrentham Celeste told him this:

III.

"He had known
My dear father, who formed his acquaintance in one
Of our jaunts for health-seeking; and he afterward,
When the news of the death of my parent he heard,
Knowing how we were circumstanced, came all the way
To our far Provence home, there such aid as might lay
In his power to render, and kindly extend
From his mother to us a request that we spend

A few weeks at their Devonshire home by the sea.
This we did; and by my loving mother and me
Has that visit been fondly remembered.

"We learned
Hospitality English to gauge; and discerned
What it is that the core of Old England's heart forms;
That one sun that great heart and America's warms;
Learned that Home, in that kindred and common-hearthed land,
Means the same that it means on our own native strand;
And that, speaking one tongue, English still all are we,
On whichever side of the so wide parting sea
It be ours to have birth.

"What a beautiful bride
Will Ray Wrentham have! He, I am sure, will take pride
In conveying her home to his country, where few
Are the types of pure beauty as her own so true."

IV.

Whate'er shadow had been on Mark's countenance shown
Fled at this frank disclosure in heartiest tone.

V.

. . . Having now changed the subject, Mark pleasantly touched
On the eloquent topic her mother had broached;
And he told of the gain that lay in the pursuit,
As a study, of art; how it ripened the fruit
Of the best observation, and new life awoke,
And a better, in brain and in heart; then he spoke
Of the primary principles that underlie
All art; claimed that a bird might as well seek to fly
Without wings, as an artist to paint or to draw,
But he not read in Beauty's grand, unwritten law.
And he told her how sweet was the labor of art,
If one labors in light, and with joy in the heart;

But how dull and despondent such labor must prove,
With mechanical hand, and the heart cold to love.
He expressed his regret, in a tone sad and low,
That his fate had divorced him from art long ago;
And then, turning his glowing black eyes upon her,
Thus he said, while her own on his riveted were:

VI.

"*Semper macte virtute*, my sweet little friend;
To your love for true art make all purposes bend;
Struggle on; struggle hard; struggle humbly and long;
You have youth; you have health; you are ready and strong.
Of art's temple shrink not to sit down at the gate:
The reward cannot fail, if in patience you wait.
If in rags long enough your bowed soul be content
To remain in abasement and bitterness bent,
And oppressive belittlement, some golden morn,
Out of heart-wringing effort success shall be born;
Your glad vision the great swinging portal shall greet;
And then, entering, you shall sit at the king's feet."

VII.

. . . Occupation delightful to Mark it had proved
To instruct young Celeste in the art that he loved;
And the more he told her of the things he had told
To her mother in dearly recalled days of old,
The more strongly of Helen's ways her ways partook,
The more often did Helen's eyes out of hers look.

VIII.

It was not many evenings since he had first called,
When, on taking his leave, Mark was startled, appalled,
At two things: First, to glance at his watch, and behold
The too harrowing tale its sad face could have told,
If watch-dials had tongues; secondly, while he held



While he held
Celeste's soft, yielding hand, that there welled
Out of fathomless eye-depths a look . . .

Celeste's soft, yielding hands, that there welled
Out of fathomless eye-depths a look that so glowed
As in eyes of a young maiden look never should,
Where love gives not the charter, to tongue and to eye,
To speak language that nature is fain to supply.

IX.

Mark might well be appalled. It is not a light thing
To awaken in such a breast germs slumbering,
Though but stir they as dreamer may fitfully break
From the chains of soft sleep ere the day-god doth shake
His gold locks, and the world and the soul doth arouse,
And put slumber to shame.

X.

He had not dared to pause,
And a second time meet that look then, but, while guilt
His heart flushing no less than his features he felt,
Hastened to his hotel, and thence took the first train
For his farm.

XI.

. . . Burning still all the way was his brain.

* * * *

XII.

. . . Reaching home, he put saddle on his fleetest steed,
And rode over the prairie at fiercest of speed,
Seeking thus from the strong breath of nature to draw
Tonic courage to meet the new danger he saw;
Then bent sternly to labor: held plow; wielded fork;
Lifted spade; handled hoe; did all menial work;
And he thought, ever thought, while he struggled away,
On the day he returned, and the following day,

And the day after that, and the next, and the next;
And he preached to himself, with the heart for a text,
And expounded the ethics of life and of love
To himself; and thus to himself did he prove,
With most logical clearness, that he, Landis, was
Little less than a villain, infracting clear laws,
If not those that were human, at least those divine;
Then did penance, like Henry at slain Becket's shrine.

XIII.

And these thoughts led him into a searching review
Of his life for the past score of years.
He went through
The whole vista, back into empirical days,
When his course first branched out into widening ways;
And through years full of promise and years full of pain,
And through seasons of loss and through seasons of gain,
Traced the breaking of trust through the clouds of despair;
His escape from the lowest ambition's set snare;
His way o'er the dull years of hard labor to health;
And the sacrifice offered of art unto tilth.

XIV.

"And what is the net gain?"
Thus he questioned himself.
"I have gained in blood, brawn, tan, horse-knowledge, and pelf;
I have won high repute as a breeder of steers,
While my sheep and my pigs have been noted for years.
I've secured a strong footing at fairs and horse-shows,
And my word carries weight as a breeder of cows.

XV.

"This my gain, then, has been; and does this gain suffice?
Does it compensate me for the loss of the prize
Which I set out to win in those jubilant years,

When, full armed with resolve, I laughed down all my fears?
True, my life I have won: this is something—how much?
Saving it, I have lost that deft, delicate touch,
Wherewith once I felt equal to cope with the great,
Some grand work with my pencil in time to create,
And thus build for myself a sure roadway to fame.
When truth gave me the sign that my confident claim
On far years health impeached, I looked fate in the face;
On fame's scroll thought a name in my heart's blood to trace,
To be read in the story of art; and then die.
This were great, and courageous. This were to aim high,
And to miss not the mark.
"But I lowered my aim.
Immortality's hope sank in rustic acclaim!
I missed that: I won this. I have lived. I have shunned
The fate then close impending. My soul I have sunned
In material luck.

XVI.

"This I've won. Yet I've lost
In the battle of life. At by far too great cost
I have reaped small advantages, counting for naught
In the reckoning genius against me has brought.
I possessed a rare gift, and I bartered it off
For a few years of life, more or less, in the rough.

XVII.

"As if, just in the opening hour of a battle,
When the muskets of skirmishers already rattle,
One who is assigned to a charge in the struggle
Should shrink at the rallying call of the bugle,
And shirk with the cowardly plea: 'Life is dear,
And 'tis better to save it than peril it here,
Where renown at such cost must be won; thus I'll turn

From the danger-fraught scene, and leave others to earn
The dear honor that comes but with wounding and death,
Content glory to lose with the saving of breath;'—
So have I, in my earth-hugging paltering, done;
So fled I, craven-like, with life's fight scarce begun,
Seeking safety, and peace, and a nameless career,
With the demon Remorse hissing scorn in my ear.

XVIII.

"And while thus I have been yielding up, one by one,
The stern requisites fame was dependent upon,
Can it be that I've yielded up something beyond—
Something of the nice sense that forms honor's true bound?
While with time I have compromised all the years through,
And have lowered my once lofty aim, is it true
That I've lowered as well manhood's standard of tone?
Let my course for the months that have recently flown
Give the answer.

"Am I the Mark Landis who stood,
Laughing down, once, temptation's soul-pestering brood?
And am I the Mark Landis who scorned the world's ways—
Scorned them only to follow them into the maze
Of flirtation, and grow but a trifler in things
To which all that is best in life's gentler realm clings?

XIX.

"Ah, my days have been barren indeed! Having lost
High ambition's great hopes, honor's line having crossed,
I stand here where the ways of existence divide,
With a youth grown to thistles on life's farther side.

XX.

"And now, what is there left?

"To live on with my steers,
And my colts, and my pigs, to the end of my years;

And then, quitting ignobly the purposeless strife,
As unnoticed as possible sink out of life;—

XXI.

"*Unless;*"——

Here, with a thrill, and a strange, startled air,
(In the moonlight he sat, in his old easy chair,)
Landis paused in his musings; and half do I think
That the man in the moon must have given a wink,
And a smile in the bargain; for that man observed
(If he did not, his eyesight a poor purpose served)
Flit across, then, the sombre, stern face of the farmer
A soft, tender light, which his cold heart made warmer—
That is, the cold heart of the man in the moon,
Whose demeanor we could not with justice impugn;
For throughout the long ages in which he had kept
At his post, he had looked on while conscience-storms swept
Over spirits the cleanest and truest; known hearts
Pure as crystal deep pierced by contrition's keen darts,
And seen blameless-lived saints mortifying the flesh
By long fastings severe and the flagellant lash;
And he might well have smiled, as we, reader, may smile,
To see our chosen hero assume so much guile,
As such sensitive souls have been wonted to do,
Since one Nature to copy was held up to view,
All transcendent;——

"*Unless* I should list to the whispers
That come like the prayer of a maiden at vespers,
Sweet, gentle, inspiring, with rhythmic wealth laden,
Like charmèd refrain sung afar in fair Aidenn."

XXII.

The old calendar print all have seen, I presume,
Of the hard-tempted saint, in his cell's sombre gloom,

Close surrounded by forms bright, luxuriant, fair,
Seeking his austere soul in their wiles to ensnare.

XXIII.

Came to Landis temptation in shape of a devil
That shunned, at first, e'en the appearance of evil;
Came clothed in suggestions all gleaming and golden;
Came calling to life yearnings silenced and olden;
Came telling a lying tale devils all tell,
Of a might-have-been vanished, that may be lived still;
Of a changing of life's tidal ebbing and flow,
In maturity's veins causing youth's fires to glow;
Of a stoppage of hands on the dial of time;
And of grafting on age the new, fresh plants of prime.

XXIV.

Then, in struggling against this temptation, Mark felt
His strength yield, and his hitherto steadfast will melt;
And his hold upon earthly things weakening seemed.
. . . (The truth is, he was drowsy, and, drowsing, he dreamed.)

XXV.

. . . He was back in the morning-years. Health on her throne
Sat, while coming years smilingly beckoned him on;
And he wandered alone in a realm filled with art:
Concord reigned in the land, while peace reigned in his heart.
All the forms, shapes, and phases of beauty were there,
And all objects in harmony: naught but was fair.
Nature sympathized wholly with Art, and her face
Was refulgent with grandeur, and beauty, and grace.
Rapt, he gazed on the landscape spread out to his sight,
Bathed in effluent, mellowed, and mist-softened light,
Edged around with horizons of purple and gold,
And in undulate billows of emerald rolled;
While unceasingly music of murmuring streams

Filled the vibrating air of this sweet land of dreams.

XXVI.

As, with grateful emotions of wonderment moved,
Through the scene of bewildering beauty he roved,
A young child approached, and, taking him by the hand,
Led him through the spelled paths of the beautiful land;
On and on led him through a still variant scene,
Such as ne'er to his fancy foreshadowed had been.
Art with Nature vied ever in charming the sense,
Through developing beauty's untold opulence.
He saw nimbused Madonnas of saintlier grace
Than a Raphaël e'er had the genius to trace;
Forms in sculpture he viewed that might Phidias shame;
Rounded domes that made Angelo's glory seem tame;
And such mirrors of Nature as Nature's self charmed,
And her breast with the fulness of loveliness warmed.

XXVII.

Thus, through marvels in marble, on canvas, in bronze,
Passed they, all Mark's soul still in captivity's bonds,
And still ceaselessly stirred with glad, sentient surprise,
Until beauty's sweet plethora wearied his eyes.

XXVIII.

Then the fairy-like child in grace suddenly grew,
And in figure was changed before his entranced view;
And ere his wildered soul fully realized yet
The bright scene of enchantment before him thus set,
In the freshness of girlhood, with gentle grace worn,
In the breaking aurora of womanhood's morn,
Stood, a queen in the realm, and obeyed in behest,
The sweet graft of Provence, the dark, large-eyed Celeste;
Yet less like the Celeste who beamed on him to-day
Than the Helen he knew in the years far away.

XXIX.

The Queen now, as the child had done, gave him her hand,
And they wandered, by zephyrs with balm laden fanned,
Till they came to a throne of pure opal; and there,
While the songs of all birds thrilled the resonant air,
And rare, blossoming plants filled the land with perfume,
Did the Queen of Art's Province her sceptre resume,
And her throne; and she beckoned to him to draw near.
He approached, and the regnante spoke but for his ear:
"O, beloved of my soul, sit thou here by my side!
Thou art king of my heart: here, too, reign and abide!"

XXX.

With the silvery tones ringing still in his ears,
Mark awoke to the issues of life and of years,
And to smitings of conscience, renewed, reinforced,
By the weft of his dreamings.

XXXI.

. . . Perturbedly coursed
All his current of thought; and again he resumed
His severe and stern searchings of self.
He now doomed
Ignominiously, at the start, each fond hope,
Each faint shadow thereof, that his dream conjured up.
Thus began he; and then he went on with the work;
And, his habit not being to dodge or to shirk,
The grim business completed.
Thus, when he was done,
Some things had been resolved, which, when acted upon,
Would reach down to the springs that change currents of years,
And renew all the phases that human life wears.

* * * *

XXXII.

One day, like a glad sunburst, appeared at the farm
Sweet Celeste, and forthwith the old homestead grew warm
With the glow of her genial presence, the gloom
Which had been lurking there for bright cheer making room.
Mark and Helen, whose intercourse now was more strained,
Had the distance between them severely maintained,
And with shadows invested the past-hallowed place,
Which were driven away by Celeste's gentle grace.

XXXIII.

Landis called on Celeste there, as in duty bound;
But no further occasion this amateur found
To gaze into the depths of her art-tutor's eyes,
As he kept careful guard against any surprise,
And all-feeling within its due limits restrained;
For, though bright be the sunshine, there must be maintained
Requisite discipline and solemnity where
Persons tread over graves, as was now the case there.

CANTO ELEVENTH.

RETRIEVAL.

I.

Among other things Mark had reproached himself for,
Was his course with respect to fair Blanche. Upon her
He had thus far been wont to look but in the light
Of a source of diversion, keen, novel, and bright—
As a section of sunshine his path thrown upon,
Warming all the air round him; accustomed had grown
To treat her as a proper, legitimate source
Of still fresh entertainment whenever the course
Of the blood through his veins became turbid or slow,
Or the clouds of regretful reflection hung low.

II.

He had never thought farther than this; had not asked
Of himself what the end was to be, while he basked
In the light of her smiles, which he could but discern
Beamed with brightness especial whene'er in her urn
He burned incense, which, ruefully be it confessed,
He had lately been learning to do with the rest.

III.

Blanche all hopes had relinquished that she may have nursed
Of e'er winning the heart of all hearts to her first,
And with things as they were seemed to be satisfied,
While the means of amusement for him she supplied.

IV.

But was Mark right in making such use of a soul
With his own a full peer, and in no wise a thrall?

V.

In the olden time, when there were jesters at court,
'Twas the monarchs and nobles who made them their sport
Were debased, rather than the poor jester himself;
But to-day, with this custom long laid on the shelf,
There are ways still existent in which men degrade
Their own souls, while of other souls footballs are made.
There's a species of dallying frequently plied
By the best-meaning men, that is closely allied
To the rankest coquetry the soft sex commit,
And no less deserves censure.
That women permit
Marked civilities too closely pressed, in no wise
Justifies those who pay them. To blindfold the eyes
Does not alter the truth, and the conscience to steel
Does not cancel the guilt that strict honor should feel—
Guilt in honor's court standing recorded, alas,
Of too many who muster as gentlemen pass.

VI.

As I've said, Mark was now doing penance: and one
Of the acts thereof he had determined upon,
Was to make reparation to Blanche.
Now, the way
In which this was achieved is so rare in this day,
That I hesitate somewhat in telling it, fearing
I shall be accused of to truth not adhering.

VII.

When next into the city our penitent went,
Were his steps straight to Blanche Adair's residence bent;

And, with very small parley the talk to prelude,
Conversation to be long remembered ensued.

VIII.

"Will you tell me, Miss Blanche, whether you are engaged
To Ray Wrentham or not?"

IX.

"Frankly. I am not pledged
Yet by any thing binding."

X.

"So had I supposed;
Though I thought it quite strange he should not have proposed;
And continued my calls ('tis now in the third year!)
Till the rights of a known *fiancé* should appear.
But I deem it comports not with that which belongs
To a gentleman, when one attentions prolongs
To a lady so far as to notice to bring
His relations with her, without tender of ring
Plighting troth.

"None I judge. For myself, though, I must
Say and do what I hold to be right, to be just,
In the light of my course with relation to you,
Without heed to what others have done, or may do.
. . . Blanche Adair, I now ask you my wife to become,
If you care to share with me a plain farmer's home."

XI.

In her time Blanche too many proposals had heard,
By this one in composure at all to be stirred;
Yet that it unexpectedly came, was as clear
As that not at all harshly it fell on her ear.

XII.

A brief moment she paused; the proponent then faced,
With a look deep and searching; but nothing she traced

Satisfactory to her.

Then slowly she said:

"You don't love me, Mark Landis!"

XIII.

"No claim have I made
To a feeling for you such as springs from the heart.
If my acts have deceived you, 'tis blame on my part."

XIV.

"On that score have no scruples. No blame rests on you;
For I've not been deceived. I have had in full view
The clear truth, which ne'er once since the first hour we met
Could my heart disregard or my reason forget."

XV.

"Love, you hold, as I've oft from your lips understood,
Non-essential is in '*mariage à la mode.*'"

XVI.

"So I've strongly declared. I could be a good wife,
And could sweeten the years of an honest man's life,
Without loving him."

XVII.

"So hold not I; yet, Miss Blanche,
At your own word I've taken you, not *en revanche*,
But with firm and sincerely formed purpose to prove
To yourself such a husband as must inspire love."

XVIII.

"But the wife of Mark Landis I never could be,
Unless he with his heart and his soul should love me."

XIX.

"Why of me an exception thus make?"

XX.

"Because you
Are exceptionable among men. Ere I'm through,

I will fully explain.

"But, first, please understand
That 'tis no artifice of coquetry I've planned,
To coax stronger avowals, when thus I decline
The proposal you make to link your fate and mine.
. . . I presume you by no means expect I'll avow
The plain, unvarnished truth to you. We are just now
At the stage, in such cases, where feigning begins
In good earnest. But, somehow, with all of my sins
In this line, I'm impelled to be honest with you;
Which is something in no way praiseworthy to do;
For with you to speak truth is an easier task
Than with any soul wearing mortality's mask.

XXI.

"And, Mark Landis, this point-blank rejection now leaves
Blanche Adair's tongue unloosed, and the right to her gives
With a freedom to speak such as rarely accrues
To a woman—a right that I'm not loath to use.

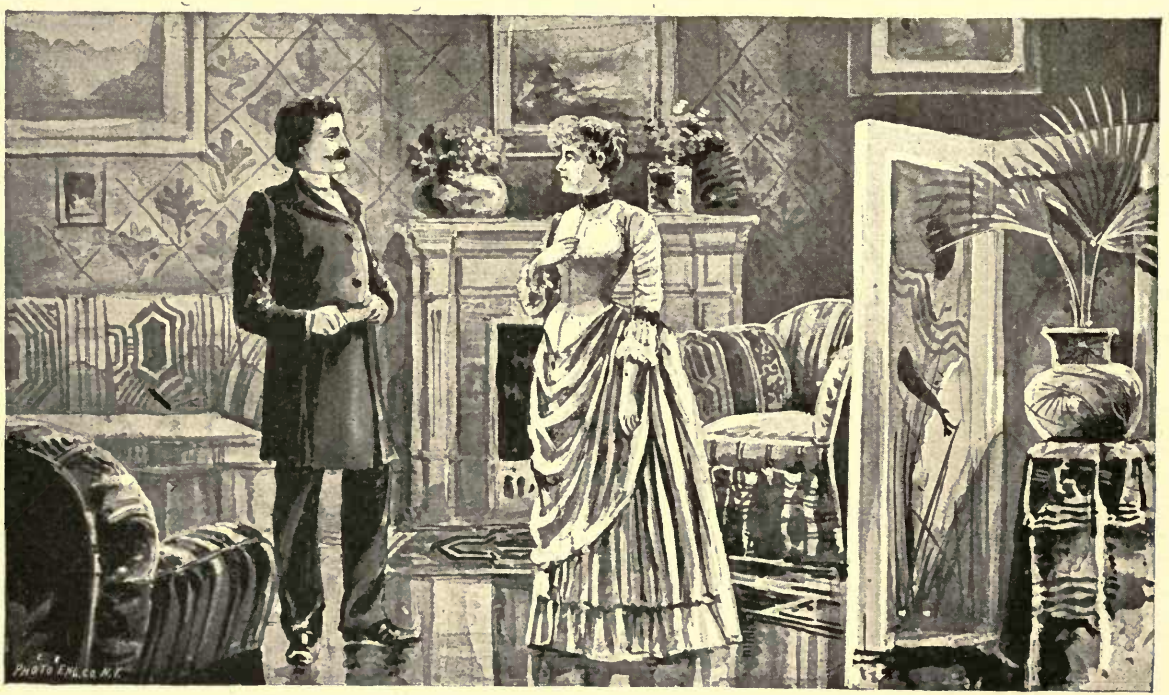
XXII.

"Know this, then, that *I love you!*

"And, pray, do not start,
With astonishment large, that the light Blanche's heart
Should be once capable of a feeling like love!
Could the right heart love hers, what a faith could she prove!

XXIII.

"No, Mark Landis! Unless I possessed your whole heart—
And demand I should make for the uttermost part—
Truth tells me I could never be happy with you
As your wife;—though, since fate in one path our feet threw,
Have the suns as they coursed seemed more brightly to shine,
And rare seasons of joy and delight have been mine,
Even after I yielded all hope of one day



Know this, then, that I love you!

And, pray, do not start, . . .

To your heart gaining entrance and there holding sway.
'Tis a pleasure to meet you, and call you my friend,
And to love you, as you I must love, to the end,—
Not with grievous repinings and longings—O, no!
These are not for the gay Blanche Adair e'er to show.

XXIV.

"I know now where your heart is. I did not, until
The Rolfes came. On that evening, in the quadrille,
'Twas revealed to me as by electrical flash.
That scene served to earth any hope remnant to dash.

XXV.

"But not this alone have I observed. I have seen,
On the part of the being whose star you have been
Through the long night of memory, evidence plain
That the love of life's morning has never known wane.
'Twas the hope that expired with her advent—a hope
That could not with a love between *such* natures cope—
Which induced me to hold thus in dalliance long
The young Englishman. Has not my tenure been strong?
Have I not most adroitly manœuvred? This is the way
We society belles—we coquettes, if you will—our games play;
And methinks Blanche Adair with the best holds her own!
I have not won your love, for 'twas not to be won;
But I'm satisfied! Pleasant has been the pursuit,
Although home it has brought not the waited-for fruit.

XXVI.

. . . "Now, then, tell me, Mark Landis, with your tongue
of truth,
That at heart you despise me, and my want of ruth;
And let me my own ways in the world go, while you
Shall go yours; and thus let it be said there are two

Of the myriad hearts in this heart-o'erstocked world,
That each other have never deceived."

XXVII.

. . . With lips curled,
And a tinge on each cheek, which persistently strove
With the paleness that else therefrom all color drove,
She stood, fearless and fair, looking straight in the eye
Him 'twas hers to love, honor, respect, and defy;
Whom she feared, and yet feared not; held, and released.

XXVIII.

For some moments Mark stood, after Blanche had thus ceased,
With thrilled interest moved, although scarce with surprise,
Gazing silently into her bright hazel eyes—
Brighter now with the light in their clear depths that glowed,
Than e'er yet they had been in all changes of mood.

XXIX.

"Blanche Adair," he now said, "with a strange frankness fraught
Are your words. But by those let a verdict be brought
Who are competent: I have no judgment to give:
I have no stone to throw, Blanche, while you and I live;
For to *one* heart the soul of true justice you've been,
And that heart is not blameless, whate'er be your sin.
. . . But still further let me extend frankness, and say,
That the love you think lives as of old, is to-day,
If it ever lived, dead upon one side, although,
I am free to say, not upon mine."

XXX.

"Nay, not so.
O, my friend, not for naught have I studied the heart!
Not for naught on heart-subjects I've practiced my art!
Her I've met unto whom your heart has been as true

As the shell to its lover the sea; looked her through;
Probed and studied her; felt her deep scorn; and I say
That her love never did, never will die away!"

XXXI.

"Ah! be not overwise in your day, Blanche Adair!
Hold not out to me hopes that are speciously fair!"

XXXII.

"From what motive should I these facts misstate to you,
When my life I would give but to have them untrue?
. . . But, my friend—may I still call you so?"
"While years last."
"On your friendship the burden will you let me cast
Of a confidence?"
"What you may please."
"Ere your name
Was announced, from Ray Wrentham this sharp letter came:

XXXIII.

DEAR MISS BLANCHE:

I scarce think you can reasonably
In the least wise importunate deem it in me,
To insist that the time has now come to demand
Something definite from you concerning your hand.
Hitherto, when I've sought to draw this from your lips,
Your charmed converse has ever availed to eclipse
My persistent and firmly resolved questionings.
But relentless time, Blanche, other life-issues brings;
And I beg you'll recall what you're wont to declare,
That love should not be made too strong tension to bear.
I start on a brief trip to the country, to-day,
An old visit, to Wrentham Hall made, to repay.
If I find, on returning, (a week or two hence,)

No decision yet rendered, my visits from thence,
As a suitor, will cease.
Sweet, Miss Blanche, are your words,
Are your ways, is your smile, is your life; and while cords
Harshly stricken will vibrate with pain, yet there's due
To myself a stern duty no less than to you.
Still my hand, and my name, hold I at your command;
And the word, as of old, of a Wrentham will stand.
Let me beg you to choose, then, by yea or by nay,
And release from suspense
Your still loyal friend,
RAY.

XXXIV.

"This, concisely," said Blanche, "does Ray Wrentham's note
mean:
Halts my knight from far Albion two loves between,
As men often have halted since love was first born,
And as men will oft halt while love's chains shall be worn.
Passion strongest of man, that hath ever had bud
And had bloom, since the dove told the ebb of the flood,
Its degrees hath, its weakness, its faintness of breath,
Its all-jubilant life, its decay, and its death."

XXXV.

"Do you this rule apply unto man's love alone?"

XXXVI.

"Woman's less have I tested," she answered, in tone
Of arch frankness.
"But, my confidant, tell me, pray,
How to act in this case. Come! I'll do as you say!
You shall arbiter be. 'Tis for you to declare
What the future shall be of your friend Blanche Adair!"

XXXVII.

"Does Ray know that you love him no more?"

"He believes
That my love is as green as the mistletoe leaves."

"Blanche!"

"You start."

"I'm impelled to admit I am pained!"

XXXVIII.

"I perceive you know little of flirting, my friend.
Well, 'tis not a misfortune to lack in this lore;
For this one thing you ever may reckon as sure:
That yet never did any flirtation proceed,
Which was not based on falsehood, in word or in deed.
With this instrumentality taken away,
Bless me! how would we belles hold our silvery sway?

XXXIX.

"And now, while in the mood, let me sing you an air,
Which embodies the code of your friend Blanche Adair.
'Tis no code that Mark Landis could ever approve,
But this code is in force in the world's courts of love."

XL.

The piano he opened for her; and, in strains
That seemed bidding defiance to fate, these refrains
She poured forth, while, with feelings confused,
Half offensively shocked, half surpris'dly amused,
He attentively listened, as clear her notes rang,
And thus lightly of love's earthly tenure she sang:

Love's Tenure.

I.

I loved a maid when life was tender;
I loved her with my heart and soul,
With passion serving to engender
Conceit that I held full control
Of her heart's springs
And fancyings.

II.

My love exceeded rhyme or reason;
I felt no doubts, nor harbored fears;
To hold love mortal was but treason;
I deemed it hemmed not by earth's years,
But looked beyond
For its true bound.

III.

My maid had vowed love past all telling;
Her troth had she eternal deemed;—
Yet absence chilled her faith up-welling;
Another dream of love she dreamed;
Another's breast
Her heart gave rest.

IV.

But sweet requital gained I gladly:
A second maid I loved as well
As that first one I wooed so madly;
Yea, loved her better, sooth to tell;
And now my heart
Feels not love's smart.

V.

And should this one likewise betray me,
Another joyfully I'll hail;
Another shall console and stay me;—
His votaries ne'er doth Eros fail.
Thus shall my heart
Repel love's smart.

VI.

Love I no more regard eternal;
I pledge my dear but this warm life.
Let others taste love's joys supernal:
Give me the love of earth's thrilled strife,
With fealty blent,
And I'm content.

VII.

Thus peer I ne'er beyond the portal
That opes into futurity;
If true my dear be while she's mortal,
Beyond the Styx she shall be free.
And thus my heart
Shuns e'er love's smart.

XLI.

The song finished, she turned to the master who stood
At her side—he who could have controlled her least mood,
At whose bidding naught was there she would not have done,
Or have dared, or endured; and the theme they were on
Thus resumed:

"As to Wrentham: what do you decide?"

XLII.

Mark was silent a space; then in earnest replied:
"Though you sing, as you speak, in light tones, Blanche Adair,
Through your eyes I look into your soul, and see there
Capability great things to do. I appeal
To that soul to prove once more to womanhood leal,
And, a second time in one for me deathless day,
To show forth such true courage as Blanche Adair may.
To yon ancient and time-honored halls do not go,
To make there of love's mockery conscienceless show.
Let Ray win, if inclined to, this young heart of gold!

That 'tis 'on with the new love and off with the old,'
Yours the blame. Let him go; and while far summers teem
With their fruitage will my soul hold yours in esteem.''

XLIII.

No response came from Blanche. In her seat she turned round
At the instrument, thrummed at the keys, and profound
Her absorption in revery seemed, while Mark stood,
Her long silence respecting, and not in a mood
To infract it.

At length the stirred cords, cadent grown,
Began gradually to take measure and tone;
And without premonition her silver voice sang
An air which with unwonted sincerity rang,—
One in contrast most strange with that she had just sung,
And which had in Mark's mind with harsh dissonance rung.

Friendship's Tomb.

I.

I've buried, 'mid regrets and tears,
A friendship, treasured up for years.
It shrank not 'neath the summer's heat;
In vain the chill blasts 'gainst it beat.
To friendship's tomb, bereaved heart, bring
The fragrant blossoms of the spring.

II.

But came a breath by passion breathed,
And burst the garland lealty wreathed;
And friendship, starving with neglect,
Died in its prime, unstained, unflecked.
To friendship's tomb in summer bring
The blooms from earth's ripe breast that spring.

III.

The dawns will come, the sunsets go;
The heart will other friendships know;

But, long as truth shall honored be,
This first will stand in memory.
To friendship's tomb in autumn bring
The flowers that still to earth-life cling.

IV.

The fervent god of love may scorch
The heart with passion's flaming torch;
But ne'er will purer sentiment
Bless earth than in this grave lies pent.
To friendship's tomb in winter bring
The leaves the lorn trees from them fling.

XLIV.

Blanche arose from the instrument, and, facing Mark,
Who preserved silence still, slowly made this remark:
"You perceive I can serious sing for the nonce.
How my improvised song do you like?"

XLV.

"I've ne'er once
Inability dreamed of assigning to you
To converse, sing, or feel with an earnestness true.
I'll more gladly retain strains of this tender lay,
Than of that which, you say, gives love's code of to-day.
To the latter will Memory deafen her ears,
While the former will greet her through seasons and years."

XLVI.

There had now come some color to Blanche's white brow;
And resuming, in tones at first measured and low,
Then elastic and light, as in her wonted mood,
While with interest deepened Mark watching her stood,
She recurred to his last and so earnest appeal,
And assent gave in accents that caused him to feel
That a woman stood by him with heart and with soul,—
Though a woman, alas, who missed womanhood's goal:

XLVII.

"Passing pleasant and sweet, to a woman like me,
Were the fortune of Wrentham Hall mistress to be;
But still pleasanter, sweeter to gain is the end
That shall win the approval and praise of my friend.
I will do what you counsel me: this very day
I'll convey to Ray Wrentham his half-asked *congé;*
And for your sake I'll suffer what belles all ill brook—
Supplantation in preference.

XLVIII.

. . . "Now, I will look
Round the field for new conquests.
"To arms! *Gare!* Heigh-ho!
'Tis a merry world!
. . . "Bah! a tear!
. . . "*Please*, my friend, *go!*"



CANTO TWELFTH.

SHADINGS.

I.

Once a traveler stopped at Dieppe, by the sea.
. . . Old Dieppe! Dear Dieppe! There are fairer than thee
Among towns, there are brighter; but as, nodding there
O'er thy tasks, in the mists of the Normandy air,
Sittest thou, washes not the sea's billowy brine
A shore thicker with memories, Dieppe, than thine!

II.

Absorbed fully as much in the days that were flown,
As in those that relentlessly ever march on,
Over relics and remnants of glories gone by,—
Over graves, and regrets, and old minsters, where lie
Heroes, sages, and bards the world tries to forget,
In an age in utility's hard ethics set,—
Strolled the wanderer church and cathedral beside,
By the Norman erected in days of his pride,
And at length rambled old Dieppe's fish-wharves among,
Where were gathered a seething and struggling throng
(All with huge market-baskets strapped on their small backs)
Of tanned, skinny fishwives, who were unloading smacks
Of their herring-freight, round the far Hebrides caught,
And to this port by canny Scots fishermen brought,
Who in vain tried to cope, in their starved Gaelic brogue,
With these Norman adepts in deep fish-dialogue.

III.

These quaint shapes, with their high caps, *à la Normandie*,
And their coarse woollen skirts, reaching scarce 'neath the knee,
And their clump wooden shoes, (being cousins, 'tis proved,
Of the Conqueror William, a few times removed,)
In their hard features showed deeply seamed lines of care,
And the marks of time's usage the wretched all bear.
The vast mass of the faces in henna seemed dyed;
There were few that were not wrinkled, shriveled, and dried;
And, but for the exceeding large measure of life
With which all the bizarre *camaraderie* was rife,
One might fancy that from Thebes's sepulchred gloom
Unswathed mummies in squadrons to market had come.

IV.

Here and there, in this crowd, might be seen a sweet face,
Exquisite in simplicity, nature's own grace
Forming contour of loveliness strikingly fair,
With complexion bespeaking health fresh as the air,
With bright eyes, rosy lips, and clean kerchief and gown,
And neat cap, underneath which a curl struggled down.
These so strong contrasts with the witch-faces were few,
But were fair as rose moist still with kiss of the dew;
And they seemed, 'mid the rest, like doves vultures among,
Like rare jewels on fierce monsters idolized hung,
Or like souls from Elysium, Styx crossing o'er,
Seeking spirits lost on the Plutonian shore.

V.

Then the traveler, pondering on the strange lives
Of these toiling and moiling yet lively fishwives,
Having knack of chance-sketching, outlined this weird scene,
Catching varied expressions, harsh, sordid, and mean,
Anguished, sorrowing, reckless, coarse, deadened, and dull;

And, among them distributed, fair, sweet, and full,
All the faces of beauty that could be discerned,
In their newness of life, with its lore all unlearned;
And sketched also the herring-smacks, and a great barque,
Freighting for the dim shores that the farthest zones mark;
The loose cordage, and sails, and the sailors around,
Lying lazy and listless; some boats outward bound;
With a touch of the town, in its garb antique dressed;
And the sun sinking down in the purpling west.

VI.

In far years these stray sketches the wanderer wrought
Into one, into which was thrown closest of thought
And severest of toil.

VII.

Would you like, reader mine,
To behold this so strongly ambitious design
Upon canvas with faithfulness placed?
Come with me.
We will not again cross the old troublesome sea;
But I'll carry you back to the prairies once more,
Where we've hoped, smiled, and wept, in the dear days of yore,
With our good friends, my characters.

VIII.

Enter this room,
From intrusion secure.
Here, at times wrapt in gloom,
Working ever with patience, enduring and strong,
Work beginning betimes, at work lingering long,
Working often in pain, often in dark despair,
Yet with joy falling oft in brief gleams to her share—
The sweet joy of progressive achievement,—we meet
Dieppe's visitant.

IX.

Since there by wharf and by street
Strolled the loiterer, years that brought healthful events
To bless earth have successively folded their tents
And to silent oblivion stolen away,
Giving place to those bringing change, chill, and decay ;
But unchanged by those years, and unchilled by the gulf
They have bridged, is the heart of the true Helen Rolfe.

X.

Sitting thus at her painting, she broodingly mused ;
Nor could labor dispel her sad musings, infused
Though it was with her soul's strong, intense energies,
And though sweetened by all of the heart's sympathies.
For occurring events, by rude gossip-breath blown,
O'er this hallowed retreat shadows baleful had thrown,
Calling up morbid fancies and shapes of unrest
In her trial-proved, calm, and self-poised seeming breast,
Where a buried hope, rising from out of its tomb,
Had been striving to scatter the mold and the gloom,
And be clothed with the sunshine.

XI.

Thus ran the sad line
Of reflections that burdened this spirit benign :
"While, in breaking relations with that faithless one,
Wrentham fills a fond dream I had nursed for my own
Darling child; yet alas, this now closes the door
On my last hope, and *him* leaves to her evermore.
Was it wrong in me that I would take from its vase
The fond flower whose fragrance perfumed my young days,
And once more dream of holding it tenderly pressed
To my reconciled, stilled, and renouncing-wont breast?

And do I in the slightest the memory wrong
Of the dead?''

And there came with these broodings along
An increasingly bitter resentment toward her
In whom fancy abnormal saw Mark's evil star.

XII.

'Tis a proverb as old as the cedars that grow
On Mount Lebanon's sides, that fair woman doth show
To her own sex less charity than to the stronger.
Why this should be so, I have pondered on longer
Than on most problems touching the daughters of Eve,
Yet solution none cometh my mind to relieve;
And I'm still in the dark, as I am on the question
Why to woman's ear came Satan's primal suggestion
Of evil, and not unto man's,—or on one
Close akin thereto, over which weary have grown
Brains untold, to wit, why women sympathize more
With the average Blue-Beard, with corses galore
In his closet, than with the unfortunate wight
Whose repute is as clean as a cleansèd Levite,
Who no vices can boast, and no seared, wicked savor
Can show, to commend him to feminine favor.
One misstep let a woman make, and, lackaday!
Falls each prop of support from her sisters away;
But the oftener men step aside, it would seem,
For them more doth the soft sex's sympathy teem.
Why, alas, should this be? Mighty myth!

But life's durance
Too brief is to give any well based assurance
That reason (with all its resources how mutable!)
May e'er fish these lost Whys out of truth's depths inscrutable.

XIII.

Return we to our heroine, sitting alone,
Nursing wrongful resentment toward one who had done
Favor greatest for her that a mortal could do,
And therein unto womanhood proved rarely true.

XIV.

That a thoroughly womanly woman was she
Whose life-struggles I'm telling in this history,
Is but what I have faithfully aimed to set forth,
Blind no more to her weaknesses than to her worth.
In proportion as Helen had loved, she had failed;
But although failing thus, her skirts never were trailed
In the dust of coquetry, and ne'er had she been
Light of purpose since sorrow's first clouds she had seen.
There were times, it is true, when in gloom lay her path,
And around her had broken the tempest's wild wrath;
And mistakes she made oft as she groped toward light,
In the seasons when troubles had curtained the right.
But a deep earnestness e'er pervaded her days,
And made lovely her life and engaging her ways;
While the constant denial of self brought to view
Ever new depths of worth in her nature so true.

XV.

With this earnestness coloring all her career,
Springing forth from a heart whose each throb was sincere,
And experiences such as had been hers to bear,
Nought could Helen in common have with Blanche Adair,
With her life artificial, affections *blasé*,
Her adjustable ethics, instincts *égaré*,
Her world-knowledge too reaching, her flirtation arts,
And her trade, briskly driven, in men's bleeding hearts.

XVI.

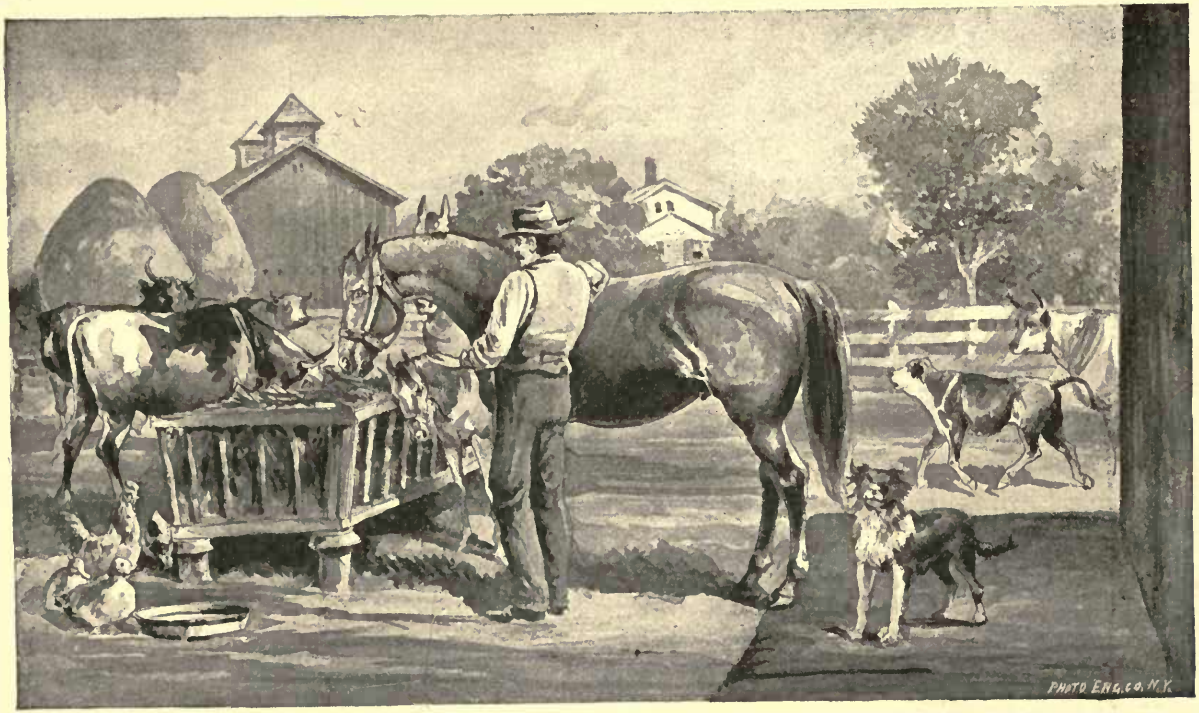
And yet women like Blanche, with the world's dust all stained,
Ofttimes rise to unselfish heights never attained
By those who through life pass with no step ever made
From propriety's rules deviating a shade.
'Tis a sphere of their own that they fill in this world;
And stones at them in myriads with unction are hurled,
As our Helen was hurling them.
Heaven o'er all
Judges justly—more justly than those whom we call
Earthly saints. Ah, I fear that sometimes ill would fare
Many merit-proved souls, if these saints had their share
In the dooming of those mortal born. He who sees
Through all human disguises and mind-mysteries,
Notes the weakness of saint as of sinner, and gauges
Deservings impartially through all the ages.
Were not this the case, and on saints we poor sinners
Had to solely rely for just judgments, the winners
In the race the Apostle declares set before us
Would be scarce, though beatified eyes should watch o'er us.

* * * *

XVII.

Since occurred the *dénouement* with frank Blanche Adair,
Mark had made sundry calls upon Helen; but rare
Of late was it his calls else than formal had been,
Helen being just now very hard to be seen.
He perceived that her mind was absorbed in some task,
Of the nature of which he had sought not to ask.
No offense did he take when she failed to appear,
Thanks to words Blanche had spoken his spirit to cheer.

He had waited in patience, with hope creeping on,
Till such time as she should with her labor be done.
At these calls sweet Celeste for her mother returned
Ever gentlest excuses.
Yet one thing Mark learned
In the course of these visits of courtesy there,
While Celeste and Ray Wrentham sole occupants were:
That to be entertained by two lovers but wrought
Vanity and vexation of spirit, and brought
Grist to nobody's mill.
Therefore Mark came to be
In his calls quite perceptibly less neighborly,—
Though some bird in his tree-tops that sang had sent strains
To his heart, which, while banishing thence all remains
Of dejection that might have been tenanting there,
Left in lieu, if not sunshine, at least not despair.



In his barn-yard, one day, in a ruminant mood,
With his dumb-languaged pets round him, Farmer Mark stood.

CANTO THIRTEENTH.

REST.

I.

In his barnyard, one day, in a ruminant mood,
With his dumb-languaged pets round him, Farmer Mark stood,
From each one of them hearing its plaint or its prayer,
And awarding to each praise or blame with its fare;
When a message from his gentle neighbor was brought,
Telling him that the pictures (which had from his thought
Nearly vanished), by him through her ordered, had come;
And would he in a leisure hour call at her home
And inspect them?
"In case they shall prove not to be
What will please you," thus ran Helen's note, "you are free
To decline them; and then, if you should not refuse
To let this artist try to paint some other views,
He can yet, I hope, satisfy you, when he knows
Something more of your taste than at present he does."

II.

In the dull, drear routine of farm-life, an event
New and fresh thus presented itself, and Mark went,
In response to the summons, the same afternoon,
Behind coursers whose steps with the airs kept in tune,
With superb effect sung by the meadowlarks gay
And the other winged troubadours lining the way.

III.

. . . I'm approaching the end of my story.
'Tis meet,
While Mark drives o'er the prairie his neighbor to greet,
That I say a last word for the latter, who nears
Now the close of the strifes that have crimsoned her years.
In this narrative I have most earnestly sought
To do justice to my heroine, who has "fought
A good fight", and, I hope it is clear to be seen,
In her course "kept the faith"—greatly leal of soul been.
She's faced tempters adept, that a many beguile,
With a stoutness of soul that has won on me, while
I have tried to depict it in language deserved;
And her constancy rare to inspire me has served.
Having borne herself well in the trials that trooped
Often past her, and pressed through the low clouds that grouped
Her lone pathway athwart, with fixed eye ever bent
On the pole-star which beamed in her life's firmament,
To the world she has shown, by example sublime,
How the soul may surmount the impedings of time,
And triumphant ride out all adversity's gales,
When a compass it has that ne'er varies or fails.

IV.

Such a compass had she.
It has been hers on earth
To advance the bright standard of womanhood's worth;
To show forth the resources a woman's soul hath
When it fearlessly follows inspirings of faith—
Such a faith as an iris of hope builds to span
All the universe, places itself in the van
Of the years, and calls down to the ages that pause
On the threshold of longing humanity's cause

The true watch-word of progress, the pass-word of peace,
The blest herald of trust in the Spirit of Grace.

V.

. . . Driving through the old gateway as small grew the day,
The quick ear of our farmer heard notes die away,
Which were plaintive and pensive, yet rich with the wealth
Of the voice that had cheered him in days of heart-health.
When he entered, he said:
"Ere the paintings I see,
I entreat you that strain to sing once more for me."

VI.

There was earnestness shown in his look, that of late
She had failed to observe; and her heart leaped elate.
She thought, too, that she heard, in the tones of his voice
An old, welcoming ring.
Durst her spirit rejoice?
What was this that had come like the first breath of spring,
To wake hope, and new life to her bosom to bring?
The fresh impulse gave strength, and her voice thrilled to throw
Her soul into the song, with whose tremulous flow
Her breast swelled in accord. Both the music and words
Were her own, and like these were the sweet verbal chords:

Love's Tests.

"NON SINE LACHRYMIS."

I.

I should not crave a tearless love:
Unmoistened by the drops that start
At promptings of the grief-moved heart,
'Twould not my inmost being move.

II.

I should not seek a painless love:
Who hath not suffered hath not known
The power that stays affection's throne,
And lifts the soul earth's dross above.

III.

I should not prize a clouldless love:
To its calm front I could not cling.
In shadows, not in sunshine, spring
The tests that soul-true passion prove.

IV.

The love that to my heart would bring
The largest joy, would be one tried
By tears and struggles long, and dyed
In life's wine-press of suffering.

VII.

Near her during the song he had stood, and the play
Of each muscle had watched, and the meaning that lay
In each beam of her eyes.
And, while singing, she knew
His glance scanned her, and glad her heart under it grew.

For with him, and herself, and the world, she could now
Honest be, nor need shamed be by flush on the brow
Or the cheek, signaling thrilled affection's warm glow,
And reflecting the light that gave cheer long ago.
Just now, too, something with sweetest whispering said,
Longer need she not guard against being betrayed—
That the time for betrayal's completion drew near:
Thus hope's advent, unlooked for, drove off each faint fear.

VIII.

As she from the piano arose, and led him
To examine his purchases, there was a gleam
In her eyes that spoke what never words could have told,
And made known that all fires brightly burned as of old.

IX.

"In the first I shall show you, I fear you will deem
Too expensive an order I've given. The dream

Of the artist, as often will happen, you know,
Ran beyond his original plan."

X.

Chatting so,
She with him entered into a close-darkened room,
And a curtain drew, when on a sudden the gloom
Became radiance.
And, like an avatar bright,
Burst from half the wall's surface, on Mark's dazzled sight,
Helen's work of hard months, "The Fishwives of Dieppe"!

XI.

With an artist's joy filled, he dropped backward a step,
And stood gazing thus long without speaking.
Than Mark,
Ne'er a man could more truly so labored a work
Estimate at its worth. The impression it made
Upon him lifted Helen to bliss.

XII.

Then he said:
"There lay *I* once, in old Dieppe, sketching this scene,
In the years of my dawn; and oft tempted I've been
To produce from my sketches a picture. But I—
Ah! like thousands of others!—have idly sat by,
While an artist from nowhere, without e'en a name,
Has superbly forestalled me, and put me to shame!"

XIII.

Then he carefully noted the grouping, the light,
The expressions of faces as well that were bright,
(And how brightly there blossomed each Normandy rose!)
As of those which were hideous; also of those
Of the sailors; the fishing-smacks slimy; the quay;
The great freight-loading barque; the ships putting to sea;
And o'er all, with a studied and master-hand thrown,
The empurpled rays cast by the westering sun.

XIV.

He now turned to her, saying:

"You know me too well,
Not to know I am pleased beyond power to tell
With this painting. And never for work have I paid
Less reulctantly than will this payment be made,
When you tell me the price which the artist has set,
Whatsoever it be."

XV.

"I'm rejoiced this has met
Your desire," said the heart-brimming Helen; "I'm sure
Your approval the artist strove hard to secure.
. . . Now the other we'll view."
She then, taking Mark's arm,
Led him gently away from the lingering charm
Of the picture, aloft to her studio; where,
From the easel, confronted his wondering stare
A farm-scene—not in France, not in Europe, and not
In some quiet, secluded, sequestered, far spot
Only by memory or in dreams visited;
But a scene in the fresh-blooming prairie-land laid.

XVI.

There the massive barn loomed; there men unloaded hay,
On the prairie mown newly, and mowed it away—
Its sweet fragrance one well-nigh might scent on the air;
And the horses and cattle ranged round showed such care
As a good farmer only could give them; and, lo!
The good farmer stood there—a form easy to know,
Bronzed and stalwart, broad-shouldered, and tall,
With slouched hat, and farm-dress, and yet lordly withal;
With an eye bright and clear, and one arm on the neck
Of a horse, which was giant in frame, but whose back

Told that burdens no longer in this world it bore,
Though its form yet showed much of a grace owned of yore;
And if at the four-corners, where teams stop to feed,
Had been hung up the portrait of every bay steed
In the county, of this would each farmer have said
Instantly, "Why, that's none but old Gentleman Ned,
Of the great Landers farm, more'n twenty year old;
An' ye couldn't buy him fur his weight all in gold;"
Or the substance thereof.

XVII.

(And much more, had one cared,
On occasion like this, one of Mark might have heard:
Might, for instance, have heard that he made of his farm
A reflex of his mind, and threw o'er it a charm
That was recognized all the wide region around;
That his neighbors the secret had never yet found,
Why the Landis farm yielded the finest of grain,
And its owner the bulk of fair-prizes should gain.)

XVIII.

. . . Mark was stupefied, dazed, and bewildered, and sought
The enigma to solve, him confronting. He thought
Of an artist imported, somehow, from abroad,
(Which idea on its face its absurdity showed;)
Thought of what surreptitiously might have been done
By Trelevyn; but, no—to Mark too well was known
Both the habit and hand of his old artist-friend.
Then he thought of Celeste; but could she efforts bend,
In years tender, to grasp undertakings so strong,
Asking patience that waiteth and laboreth long?
Though he deemed this her studio, yet could he not
Reconcile such a work with her years or her thought.

XIX.

Helen now seized the pencil, with palette in hand,

To the canvas stepped, and, while Mark's face was still spanned
With surprise, in one corner she dextrously wrought
A neat, deft, artist's autograph—"ΗΕΛΕΝ".
Distraught
As his features had been, they were now all suffused
With a flood of clear sunshine, whose glow was diffused
Swiftly through his whole being.
And then did it seem
As if this *éclaircissement* recalled his bright dream—
That its healthy fulfillment was here: Art's fair queen
Taking him by the hand, and her gloried demesne
Showing him.

XX.

"So surprising 'twas not," then said Mark,
"That in seeking the artist I groped in the dark;
For that you, save its spirit and ethical law,
Aught of art had conned, sought e'er to sketch or to draw,
Much less e'er held the palette, I never had known."

XXI.

"Nor so should I have done, had not seeds, by you sown
Long ago, sprung up, bearing such fruit as you see."

XXII.

"You've effected a flattering likeness of me
In this sketch."

XXIII.

"It is less so, I think, than the one
You once painted of me."

XXIV.

"What! You knew I had done
That for Richard? Ah! That was my first and my last
Effort here to revive my lost talent . . . The past,
Helen, you have far better improved than have I,"
Said he, 'neath dawning joy scarce suppressing a sigh.

XXV.

She was growing more bold.
She felt struck from her soul
The strong chains that had held it;—as 'twere, heard them fall
With harsh clank to the ground.
There was joy just ahead!
In her eyes had the light become brighter.
She said:
"If, while resting, your spirit has acted through mine,
And inspired all of worth I have wrought in design,
With full profit improved, surely, has been your time."

XXVI.

"Noble woman! a compliment all too sublime!"

XXVII.

"To show that 'tis no compliment merely, please think
What you did with the series of sketches in ink
That you made in Dieppe."
"Some of them I've retained,
And—it comes to me now—"
"You gave some to a friend?"
"Yes."

XXVIII.

"That friend, heeding well all suggestions of yours,
Learned to draw; and, when she, on her way to far shores,
In the dreamy Dieppe for rest tarried awhile,
The dull hours that hung heavy on her to beguile,
Supplemented your sketches with others, and kept
All with care, while instruction-fraught years o'er her swept;
Till, with precepts you gave graven deep on her brain,
She durst try what might your slight encomium gain."

XXIX.

These words went to the farthermost wards of his heart;
And a moment absorbed as in dream and apart

Stood he; rallying then, with a look on her bent,
Wherein gratitude, trust, and affection were blent,
He advanced to her side, gently taking her hand,
(The first time he had held it thus since earth was spanned
For him with a bright rainbow that vanished the morn
From the womb of Aurora its glory was born,)
And thus said, in tones earnest, and tender, and true,
Whose refrains rang with gladsomeness all her soul through:

XXX.

"Pupil-friend of my youth! Tutor true in the days
When the beacons of duty were dimmed by the haze
Of heart-sorrow!
"From depths of my being I seem
To be nerved to fulfil yet my morn's ardent dream!
To my spirit there comes a strong voice, to command
That I now in the courts of the Beautiful stand,
As I stood in days halcyon, there to find task
For my hand, and seek harvest I ventured to ask
Of the years in their prime. There's a harbingered hope
Bids me try. I'll obey, and my labor take up
Where I left off a score of years gone.
"'Tis my turn,
Now, at *your* feet to sit, and art-lessons to learn.
. . . But there's one thing I must not forget. You have made
With this artist some terms as to price to be paid.
Please to state them."

XXXI.

"She leaves this entirely with you,"
Helen said, looking full in his face, while still grew
In her cheek warmer glow.

XXXII.

Ah! The lights on the shore
Have by Landis been signaled at last! Now no more



Her head sank on his true, strong, and masterful breast,
Where she found the years' guerdon—ineffable rest.

Will his barque be tossed on the wild billows of doubt,
Or among despair's breakers dashed fiercely about!

XXXIII.

He said:

"She is magnanimous!

"But, let me see
If acceptable what I shall proffer will be."

XXXIV.

Round her waist, like a thief, had been stealing his arm;
And she found herself nearing his dominant form.

XXXV.

"What I have to bestow in a sheaf I will bring:
For the first, I will give her a diamond ring;
Next, I'll give her a solid, plain ring, all of gold;
And some treasures I've kept since the glad days of old.
Then, I'll give her one third of my houses and lands,
And the whole of a heart that has never known bands,
Save her own; and a faith that shall live through the years,
And shall follow her on, beyond time, beyond tears.
. . . Will this do? 'Tis wage scanty for worker so true."

XXXVI.

There was mist in her eyes.

She but breathed:

"That will do!"

XXXVII.

Her head sank on his true, strong, and masterful breast,
Where she found the years' guerdon—ineffable rest.

THE END.

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